



THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
THE DEPARTMENT OF ISLAMIC AND MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES

**HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN OMAN
1970 – 2002
CHALLENGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis is all my own work.

Saif Al Ramadhani

Abstract

Higher education in Oman, as in other countries of the world, constitutes the basis of human resources development required to accelerate the expansion and improvement of conditions by training the citizens of the Sultanate to a suitably qualified level. This aim is achieved by equipping people with all the skills necessary to enable them to make a constructive contribution to the success and prosperity of the nation. Therefore, opportunities in higher education are offered to all those who intend to pursue their studies according to their abilities and competencies, and within the limit of public and private financial resources designated for this sector.

The government of Oman has shown a special interest in higher education, particularly during the last few decades, for it is linked to the increase in the national income, population, number of secondary school leavers and general social development, as well as the expanding range of society's needs. To deal with these changes, many higher education institutions have been established around the country, and laws and regulations have been drawn up to administer them in addition to allowing the private sector to invest in higher education by establishing private colleges and universities.

This study describes higher education policies in Oman (between 1970 and 2002) by applying a chronological and analytical approach. The writer presents regional and international comparisons and concludes with a few recommendations.

Chapter One discusses the definition of higher education and the approach used in the research, and examines a few relevant case studies. Chapter Two analyses the government's initiatives in higher education during the 1970s. Chapter Three focuses on the efforts made by the government to improve higher education in the 1980s. Chapter Four looks at the status of higher education in Oman between 1990 and 2002. Chapter Five of this study sheds light on the features of higher education and the challenges facing it, ending with a few suggestions that the researcher believes to be essential for further progress in this vital sector.

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Abbreviations

ALECSO	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
BSc	Bachelor of Science
GCC	Gulf Co-operation Council
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
GPA	grade point average
HND	Higher National Diploma
ISESCO	Islamic Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization
OND	Oman National Diploma
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization
VTA	Vocational Training Authority
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Chapter One

Introduction and Framework of the Research

Introduction

Human capital is viewed as one of the most essential basic requirements for the development and progress of any nation, especially if this resource is highly qualified and well trained. It is a resource whose skills and abilities are worthy of investment by the government in its march towards the achievement of progress and prosperity for both the individual and society. This important component of the national economy is being given increasing and special attention by governments world-wide in their provision of education and training courses. People from all backgrounds are being encouraged to take advantage of this provision at every level: pre-school, basic, graduate and post-graduate. Furthermore, the international specialist agencies and organizations emphasize that everyone has the right to an education, for it is a necessity of life and a means of achieving a good standard of living and freedom. This fact was stated in the first item of the 26th Article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, as follows:

Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit. (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002)

In its 4th article, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education expands on the principle of the general availability of education by requiring the “State Parties to the Convention [to] undertake ... to formulate, develop

and apply a national policy” to this end, with emphasis on (1) obligatory school attendance; (2) the provision of an equal standard of education in all state educational institutions of the same level; (3) the eradication of illiteracy among adults; and (4) the provision of teacher-training without discrimination (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002a).

The 3rd Article of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1966 not only included these principles, but also highlighted another important aspect of education:

[E]ducation shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. ... [It] shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

To achieve this aim, the Covenant also emphasized the “progressive introduction of free education” at secondary, further and higher levels, the development of a comprehensive educational system and fellowship system, and an improvement in the teachers’ working conditions (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2002b).

The same trend was followed in the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century, Paris (1998), though with particular emphasis on (1) the unacceptability of discrimination on “grounds of race, gender, language, religion or economic, cultural or social distinctions, or physical disabilities”; and (2) the aim of providing lifelong educational and research opportunities for the highly qualified to “contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society as a whole” (UNESCO, 1998).

The World Summit on Sustainable Development, which was held from 26 August to 4 September 2002 in Johannesburg, also highlighted the importance of providing education for boys and girls everywhere by allowing them to complete the basic education stage as well as giving equal opportunities throughout all educational stages (United Nations, 2002).

Therefore, higher education receives continual support from governments, which is justified for three main reasons according to the World Bank Report published in 2002: *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education*:

1. Investments in tertiary education generate major external benefits that are crucial for knowledge driven economic and social development.
2. Imperfections in capital markets limit the ability of individuals to borrow sufficiently for tertiary education, thereby hindering the participation of meritorious but economically disadvantaged groups.
3. Tertiary education plays a key role in supporting basic and secondary education, thereby buttressing the economic externalities produced by these lower levels. Improved tertiary education is necessary for sustainable progress in basic education.

In the *Arab Human Development Report*, published in 2002, the United Nations Development Program stated a country's responsibility for higher education to be to increase government and social funding of higher education; to increase the efficiency of the use of resources in institutions of higher education; and to maximize the knowledge and social return on these institutions. To accomplish these tasks, institutions of higher education should be financially accountable, and strict accreditation systems should be put in place and rigorously monitored to ensure quality. (UNDP, 2002: 61)

The Sultanate of Oman is one of the countries where every citizen has the right to education. This has been achieved by implementing the international agreements and enshrining the right in Omani law. The 13th Article of the Omani Constitution includes the following statements:

- Education is a fundamental element of the progress of society, which the state fosters and endeavours to make available to all.
- The aim of education is to raise and improve the general standard of culture, promote scientific thought, kindle the spirit of inquiry, meet the requirements of economic and social policies, and create a generation strong in mind and body, proud of its nation, country and heritage, and committed to safeguarding their achievements.
- The government provides state education, combats illiteracy and encourages the establishment of private schools and institutes under government supervision and in accordance with the provisions of the law.

(Diwan of the Royal Court, 1996: 12)

Higher education in Oman has been given much special attention by the government with the establishment of higher education institutions in various regions of the Sultanate, the selection of Omani students to study abroad, and allowing the private sector to invest in this area by opening private universities and colleges. In addition, the consecutive Five-Year Development Plans devised by the government have concentrated on upgrading Omani human resources with education and training. The aim has been to invest the people's skills and abilities to help them play their part in national development and service to their communities. In February 1975, the Development Council approved the first Omani development strategy, which included four Five-Year Plans to be implemented within two decades. Among the long-term objectives was the improvement of human resources so as to enable the Omani population to participate in the expansion of the Omani economy. By these means, Oman has realized numerous aims regarding its human resources. This has been reflected in the increase in the national expenditure on education from one

million Omani riyals in 1971 to about 184 million in 1995, and the increase in the number of schools from 16 in 1970 to 953 in 1995. As a result the number of pupils at state schools has risen from 7,000 to 524,000, and the number of students in higher education has risen from 1800 in 1985 to more than 13,000 in 1995.

The second long-term strategy, known as the future vision of the Omani economy, Oman 2020, was begun in 1996. Among its objectives was the upgrading of human resources and the promotion of the skills and abilities of Omanis to make use of technological advances and to enable them to face the challenge of national and international changes. It aimed at establishing a competitive and efficient private sector, as well as supporting institutions and devising mechanisms by means of which future visions and common policies shared by the private and state sectors would be strengthened. Also included was the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan (1996–2000), which focused on improving the standard of the national labour force by drawing up policies and devising the relevant training courses. It sought to secure resources for expanding human skills and improving education at all levels, particularly technical education. This plan resulted in an increase in the number of higher education students to more than 37,000, and the allocation of 230.6 million Omani riyals to education in 2000. In addition, the private sector was allowed – and given support by the government – to invest in private education by establishing colleges and universities (Ministry of National Economy, 2002, 12: 66).

The current Five-Year Development Plan (2001–2005) concentrates on numerous targets in education and training. It aims to raise the number of students in higher education to 52 per cent with government support and the allocation of fellowships to students joining the private sector institutions. The Plan is also

concerned with education quality assurance, promoting the Omanization programme in the state sector, supporting and encouraging the private sector to establish colleges and universities to meet the needs of the local labour market, and expanding technical and vocational education (Ministry of National Economy, 2002a: 58–67).

The initial results of the current Five-Year Plan have seemed satisfactory, for the first private university has been established, more private colleges have been opened, and more fellowships for study in Oman or abroad have been allocated. This is in addition to the promotion of technical education courses and greater attention being given to the quality of education with the establishment of the Accreditation Council and the formulation of rules and regulations to monitor education so as to meet the standards required.

The result of these plans and strategies is that higher education has achieved various objectives at the local level; it is also expected to produce more benefits at the personal and national levels. It has been assumed that an independent educational strategy would unify efforts and invest resources in the way most suitable for promoting the higher education sector in Oman.

This research describes and analyses the stages of higher education in Oman from the 1970s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. It describes the strengths and weaknesses of every stage and the challenges facing higher education in Oman at the beginning of the new millennium.

1.1 Objectives and Problems of the Research

The expansion of higher education in Oman by ensuring the quality of its output and increasing its intake capacity, as well as maximizing its contribution to the comprehensive development of the country, requires an objective study of higher

education institutions, their syllabuses and courses, and the obstacles and challenges facing this sector. Therefore, this research aims at providing answers to the following questions:

- What types of development have taken place in Omani higher education during the last three decades of the twentieth century?
- What are the challenges facing higher education?
- What procedures are suggested to improve higher education and increase the effectiveness of its contribution to national development?

1.2 What is Higher Education?

To describe higher education, the researcher has adopted the following UNESCO definition, which is also shared by those authorities concerned with this area in Oman: “All types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational establishments that are approved as institutions of higher education by the competent State authorities” (UNESCO, 1998).

According to this definition, the following establishments are classified as higher education institutions:

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)

Private universities

Colleges of education

Technical colleges

Military and police university colleges

College of Shari‘ah and Law

Private colleges

Health institutes

Institute of Banking and Financial Studies

Islamic studies institutes

1.3 Framework of the Research

The research will focus on higher education institutions in Oman which have been established between 1970 and 2002. The main themes that will be discussed include objectives, subjects of study, level of student intake and output, development, and other related issues. The research will also examine the creation and implementation of systems and laws, as well as the establishment of the councils, authorities and ministries required to manage this sector.

1.4 Approach to the Research

The research adopts both chronological and descriptive approaches as follows:

- Tracing the establishment and development of higher education institutions in Oman and describing the related policies and systems in chronological order.
- Surveying the quantitative and qualitative issues of higher education institutions and analysing all related aspects.

1.5 Tools Used in the Research

This study is based on the analysis of numerous texts and official documents, which are rarely made available to anyone apart from decision-makers in education. Examples of these documents include official correspondence and reports, statistics, records of decisions and unpublished papers. Reference was also made to documents concerning conferences, seminars and meetings on higher education at national, regional and international level, in addition to academic studies, selected references and books on the subject of this research. In particular, reports by international

organizations concerned with international higher education provided a rich source of material relevant to this study.

1.6 Stages of the Research

The research traces the accomplishments of higher education and the challenges facing it throughout the last three decades of the twentieth century. To this end, the study consists of five chapters:

- Chapter 1 introduces the study and its general framework, including objectives, problems encountered, structure, approaches, stages of research, as well as reference to previous related studies.
- Chapter 2 describes the early stages of higher education in Oman during the 1970s.
- Chapter 3 examines the 1980s, during which higher education institutions were established and developed in Oman.
- Chapter 4 discusses the efforts made by the Omani authorities during the 1990s and up to 2002 to achieve stability in the higher education system, its syllabuses and mechanisms by the introduction, development or closing down of many of the higher education institutions and relevant government departments.
- Chapter 5 is devoted to the features and issues of higher education today and the challenges facing this sector.

1.7 Previous Studies

In a survey of previous related academic studies, the researcher could not find a single piece of research dealing specifically with the development of higher education in Oman and the problems that arose in this sector.

There are a few studies that examine education in general, such as al-Dhahab (1987), who describes the chronological development of education in Oman from the establishment of the first school in 1893 to the opening of the first university in 1986. Al-Dhahab divides the religious schools, which had been established around the country, into three levels. First, there was the basic level, during which boys and girls between the ages of 6 and 12 were taught Islamic rituals such as praying, fasting, and reading the Qur'an, as well as the fundamentals of reading, writing and mathematics. This was followed by the secondary level, which was available only to boys aged between 12 and 22. It comprised a fuller syllabus of reading, writing, Islamic studies, and mathematics, upon completion of which, students would be qualified for employment in the judiciary and accountancy. Finally, those students who had successfully completed the secondary level and had a particularly high academic and mathematical ability could enter the advanced level. Students could follow this stage to the age of 30, during which they studied Islam, Arabic and science subjects. These schools were established in some of the major cities in Oman, such as al-Rustaq, Nizwa, Izki and Salalah. In his study, al-Dhahab also discusses some of the higher education institutions, including Sultan Qaboos University, technical institutes and teacher-training institutes.

Another study, by al-Manthri (2001), "Education Reform in Oman 1970–2001: The Changing Roles of Teachers and Principals in Secondary Schools", examines the development of education, including higher education, in Oman. The researcher describes the three levels of the religious schools: basic, secondary and advanced, and refers to examples of these institutions, such as al-Khour, al-Zawawi and Sheikh Rashid bin Aziz al-Khusaibi. He also points out that Omani students

could study abroad in Qatar, Egypt, Syria, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, France, Germany, Poland and Hungary. His research shows that in 1971 the Ministry of Education selected 685 Omani students to pursue undergraduate and graduate studies outside Oman, in addition to a thousand students who had already joined universities abroad. Al-Manthri also states that a number of Omanis who had lived and studied in Zanzibar made a positive contribution to the development of Oman on their return home in the mid-1970s. He points out that UNESCO and the World Bank participated in drawing up and implementing some of the educational projects in Oman, such as programmes of adult education and the eradication of illiteracy, the teaching of Arabic as a second language, and the establishment of intermediate teacher-training colleges.

A third study by al-Yāfī (2002) discusses the educational policies of state education in Oman between 1970 and 2001. The researcher analyses briefly some of the educational syllabuses at the teacher-training colleges, the intermediate teacher-training colleges, colleges of further education, and Sultan Qaboos University. His study focuses on pre-university state education. He concludes that there is no formal educational policy in Oman, but rather implied principles as represented by the decrees, laws and educational systems. He believes that there should be a national documented educational policy based on clear-cut objectives, plans and courses.

Another two studies look at the development of educational policies in technical education and teacher-training. Al-Shanfari (1991) discusses the government's policies in technical and vocational education in Oman between 1970 and 1990, in particular the stages of development and the problems to be solved. He concludes that technical education in Oman is still far from fulfilling the needs of

both the individual and society, owing to the lack of appropriate short- and long-term policies. He also points out that technical education must be given more attention by instituting sound objectives, increasing intake capacity, improving the standard of both the students and the qualifications of the Omani teaching staff, and promoting industrial links with the local labour market, especially in areas where graduates have difficulty in finding employment. In addition, technical education should be allocated a higher proportion of the education budget and be provided with the latest machinery and training equipment. Another problem is that graduates in technical education are considered inferior by society, an attitude that prevents many students from taking up this type of training. At the end of his study, al-Shanfari suggests a few recommendations and proposals to activate the development of technical and vocational education in Oman.

A similar approach is adopted by al-Hadhrami (1994), who discusses the role of technical education and vocational training and its influence in preparing the labour force for the civil and military sectors. As a military academic, the researcher views this type of education and training from the perspective of strategic security, which he considers to be most important for the security of the nation. According to him, training Omanis to a suitably qualified level places the responsibility of national development, stability and security - bearing in mind especially the changeable international policies concerning the countries of the Gulf and their effect - on the political, economic and social future of Oman itself. Al-Hadhrami highlights the increase in the expatriate labour force and the economic, social and security problems that could result from this phenomenon. He believes that there are external and internal powers trying to create obstacles to cause the failure of, or negatively

affect, government plans for education and training. The reason for such practices is, he states, that some external powers benefit economically from Oman, by either exporting their labour force or providing the Sultanate with ready-made educational and training programmes. Other external aspects are embodied in Oman's commitment to scientific and cultural agreements, and the effect of the international economy on the national economy. Al-Hadhrami also lists the internal factors, which he believes work against a national development plan for higher education. These include:

- Personal advantage to certain business people or those who benefit from the current educational and training system in Oman.
- Private sector institutions that prefer recruiting expatriates owing to the lower wage bill.
- Presence of some dishonest expatriates employed in the planning departments in Oman.

At the end of his study, al-Hadhrami proposes that an educational strategy should be drawn up on the basis of a clear concept of the national educational policy, bearing in mind local conditions, actual capabilities and future changes.

Īsān (1995) has carried out a study that examines the objectives and courses of institutions offering teacher-training since the 1970s, particularly their efficiency and ability to achieve their goals. She highlights the positive and negative aspects of these courses in a critical analysis of the teacher-training colleges, the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University, and the teacher-training institutes. The researcher concludes that there is a need to compile clearly defined teacher-training

courses, to examine their standard and their approach, and to consider teaching practice in their design.

Higher education and its institutions in Oman have been given attention by other researchers, such as al-Lamky, "Higher Education and Underemployment in Oman" (1992). The researcher discusses the efforts made in improving human resources since the 1970s and the urgent need to plan higher education in such a way so as to meet the increasing needs of the labour market for suitably qualified and trained nationals who can replace the growing expatriate force. According to al-Lamky, the expatriate labour force constitutes an economic and social burden, especially with the increasing level of unemployment among Omani citizens. The study concludes that it is essential to give particular attention to educational and vocational orientation with the aim of investment in Omani skills and capabilities. It is also important to review the state education courses so as to include science and technology, and to focus on encouraging the critical thinking of students, the absence of which will affect them when joining university, and later, the workplace.

Al-Hashmi (1999) has produced a study entitled "The Urgent Need for an Expansion of Higher Education in Oman", in which he discusses the demand factors affecting higher education at the national and the international level in Oman. He focuses on the establishment, courses and student population of a number of state and private higher education institutions. In his conclusion, he puts forward a few proposals including the necessity of establishing more state universities, upgrading the courses at private colleges, improving technical and vocational courses, and linking all higher education institutions to the Ministry of Higher Education. He also proposes that part-time study courses should be offered at Sultan Qaboos University

to meet the increasing need for higher education, and that more scholarships should be allocated.

Al-Hajri (2002) discusses the development of higher education in his study “Human Capital Theory and the Financing of Higher Education in Oman”. The researcher concentrates on a few authorities in charge of higher education and the establishment of the Higher Education Council. He describes the achievements of a number of state and private higher education institutions, their courses of study and student populations. Al-Hajri recommends that the capacity of higher education institutions should be increased to meet the social and economic demand for higher education. He suggests that 40 per cent of the secondary school output should enter higher education annually. He also suggests that the cost of the courses of study should be reduced, for it is too high when compared with the average cost in other countries. The reason for this, in his view, is the low number of students registered in higher education and the long period that some students spend at university. Al-Hajri recommends that more higher education institutions should be established and that financial support should be available to low-income students to enable them to pursue their graduate studies in state or private colleges.

It should be noted that the studies listed above do not examine all types of higher education institutions in Oman, nor the challenges facing these institutions at the beginning of the new millennium. However, these studies do recommend the drawing up of plans for all higher education courses to facilitate their implementation, monitoring, assessment and development by the relevant authorities. It is evident that the lack of planning and strategy will lead to a situation of weakness, instability and random planning in the higher education sector, which

should be concerned with the improvement of human resources by educating citizens to a level of qualifications that will enable them to lead national development.

The first stage of devising an independent policy on higher education is to conduct a comprehensive survey of higher education institutions that exist now and existed in the past, the process of development, and the current and future obstacles facing them. This study is an attempt to fulfil this mission, which is difficult owing to the scarcity of published information on higher education in Oman and the small number of studies of this subject. In addition, although there are numerous authorities concerned with higher education, there is no central authority to provide an efficient monitoring system.

Chapter Two

Early Stage: 1970–1980

Introduction

The year 1970 witnessed the beginning of fundamental changes in various aspects of economic and social life in Oman, when Sultan Qaboos took over the reins of government on 23 July. However, before examining the early stages of higher education during the 1970s, it is appropriate to cast a glance at the initiatives taken in education generally before that date.

2.1 Education before 1970

Until the discovery of oil in 1967, the Omanis lived simple, humble lives, largely dependent on trade with the ports of the East African coast to the west and those of the coasts from India to China to the east. Fishing off the Omani coast, which extends for 1,700 kilometres, was an important occupation in addition to agriculture, which was practised in most parts of the Sultanate. However, these occupations did little to increase the income of either the individual or the government. This situation limited the capacity of the government to create the necessary infrastructure and basic services for the country. Education was one of the many services of which the Omanis were deprived, while witnessing their availability to the citizens of neighbouring countries.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly when education began in Oman. The Prophet Muhammad is said to have sent a messenger to call the people of Oman to Islam. The Omanis would study and memorize the Qur'an and Hadith so as to become devout

Muslims (al-Manthri, 2001: 55). Although historians cannot give a specific date when Islam became established in Oman, documents indicate that the Prophet Muhammad contacted the country's leaders in 6 AH. The first Omani convert to Islam was Mazin bin Ghaduba al-Tay, who travelled to visit Prophet Muhammad and devoted himself to the faith, to obeying its laws and spreading its word to his people in Oman on his return. The Arab Islamic Conquest continued for about a thousand years from the time of the Prophet's death to the eleventh century AH. With its strong merchant trading links, Oman was instrumental in spreading the word of Islam to other countries such as Persia, East and Central Africa, China and various ports around Asia (Ministry of Information, 2002). Later, many Omanis travelled outside Oman to learn more about Islam, the Arabic language, history, literature and mathematics. Jabir bin Zaid, al-Khalil bin Ahmad al-Farahidi, Ibn Duraid and al-Mubarred became famous scholars in their fields during their stay in Basra in Iraq (Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs, 2002).

Traditional education in Oman took the form of Qur'anic schools or *kuttab* (the Arabic word for religious schools). Traditional Qur'anic schooling was conducted in five places: in the teacher's house, under trees, in the mosque, in some of the famous Omani forts like Nakhal, Rustaq and Jabreen, or in castles of some of the rulers. The kind of education provided in these schools was based on three levels: basic, secondary and advanced, as described in Chapter 1.

Even before the 1970s, there were in Oman only three state primary schools catering for 909 pupils, all of whom were male, owing to the authorities' objection to educating women (Ministry of Information and Youth Affairs, 1980: 80). In addition, there were some private schools, which had been established by individual initiative

and which concentrated on religious education. There were schools established by the mosques, where the curriculum was based on reading and writing, memorizing the Qur'an, understanding religious issues, the study of the Arabic language, Islamic history, and the elements of arithmetic (Ministry of Development, 1974: 5). Finally, there were the general councils (*al-sabla*), which are widespread in the towns and cities of Oman. They educated people in the basic literacy skills in addition to their role in exchanging news, renewing acquaintance among individuals (al-Shāruunī, 1990: 144–145) and generally strengthening social ties.

The American Mission played a role in education in Muscat and Mutrah, which continued until the beginning of the 1970s, when the government closed the private Mission schools once state education was widely available throughout the Sultanate (Al-Dhahab, 1987). In addition, the company that created Omani Petroleum (PDO) in 1967 established a centre in Muscat for training administrative and technical personnel for employment in the oil installations (Ḍaḥāwī & Īsān, 1997: 4).

What is of particular interest, however, is that before the 1970s many Omanis sent their children to be educated in the neighbouring Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates (previously known as the Trucial States), Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Egypt. Sultan Sa'id bin Taymour had sent a limited number of Omanis for education abroad so that, on their return, they could be employed as teachers in the three state schools in existence at that time. Omani societies such as the Imama Movement and the People's Front sent some of their members to study abroad.

A number of those students played an outstanding role later by occupying many of the important posts in the government, and some of them are still there today. Sultan Qaboos was possibly one of those students, for his father, Sultan Sa'id, sent him to study military affairs at Sandhurst College in England. The availability of scholarships was particularly important in the development of human resources in the Sultanate by enabling the creation of leading administrators who blended their Omani origins and culture with an international education. These were the leaders who contributed to the movement for change in the Sultanate before the 1970s and who continued the administration of development in a variety of areas after that date.

2.2 Education is a Right for All Members of Society

From the time when Sultan Qaboos took power in Oman, the country witnessed a rapid development in all areas. He was greatly helped by the increase in oil revenues and the contribution of national and foreign expertise in the drawing up and implementation of plans. At the beginning of the 1970s, however, the Sultan was aware that the country lacked sufficient national expertise in administration and technical knowledge. In his first address to the nation on Omani Radio on 9 August 1970, he said:

For a long time our country has been deprived of education, which is the basis of administrative and technical expertise. Therefore, it is incumbent on us for the foreseeable future to fill the gap in administration with foreign employees. From now on, however, it has become clear that the education and training of our people should begin as soon as possible so that the Omanis will be able to govern the Omanis. (Ministry of Information, 1995: 21)

Education was one of the most important and biggest projects designated to the personal supervision of the young Sultan. He was to concentrate his efforts in this area by giving it priority in the royal plans and development programmes from 1970

to date. The ultimate goal of all development has been to improve the quality of life and achieve human happiness by raising the standard of living of all the inhabitants of the country. This is epitomized in the following excerpt from the Sultan's address to the nation, the spirit of which has inspired the current strategy to develop human resources and reform education according to a newly designed plan.

Development is not a goal in itself. Rather, it exists for building the human being, who is its means and producer. Therefore, development must not stop at the achievement of a diversified economy. It must go beyond that and contribute to the formation of a citizen who is capable of contributing to progress and comprehensive development. Such goals can be achieved by the improvement of the citizens' artistic and professional abilities, the stimulation of their creative and scientific capabilities, and the upgrading of their various skills. All this must be directed towards serving the country and achieving the happiness of all its citizens. (Ministry of Information, 1995: 428)

2.3 Early Attention to Higher Education

As the number of school pupils increased, reaching 49,229 in 1974–75 (al-Manthri, 1992: 87), the government increased its efforts to provide higher and vocational education. To this end, it made available intermediate courses for training teachers and technicians to fill the vacancies in various areas of employment in the country. These measures were implemented in tandem with the scholarships for study abroad, which had been established earlier to meet the developmental needs in various national organizations, although with a limited number of graduates. Sultan Qaboos spoke about this direction of effort in November 1974, when he said: "Today, we direct our interest and focus our efforts on higher and technical education, after having met the needs of the first stage in teaching" (Ministry of Information, 1995: 74).

This statement was the point of departure towards this kind of education, as described in the following pages. The training courses established by the government

were aimed at the primary and secondary levels of general education, university level being provided only by scholarships outside the Sultanate.

2.4 Scholarships

During the 1970s Oman depended heavily on foreign scholarships to educate its nationals to the level required for employment in various government departments. In 1973 the law governing scholarships and fellowships was passed. A Scholarships Committee was established under the direction of the Minister of Education with a membership comprising the Ministry of Education's Under-Secretary and representatives from other ministries. The Committee was to study the needs of the ministries and government departments for suitably qualified human resources, the determination of priorities, and the supervision of the implementation of a general strategy for scholarships. The Scholarships Department in the Ministry would be responsible for implementing policies decided by the Committee (Ministry of Legal Affairs, 1990).

At that time it was decided to carry out an investigation into the various aspects of sending Omanis to study abroad, irrespective of whether they were government employees or students. It was also decided to reduce or discontinue scholarships offered by certain countries and organizations that the government regarded as suspect. According to Article 15, which covered the regulations for scholarships (Ministry of Legal Affairs, 1990: 58):

1. It is not permitted for any Ministry (except the Ministry of Education) or any government department or organization to accept any scholarship from any source, and any scholarship offered to it must be submitted to the Ministry for examination by the Scholarships Committee.

2. The Ministry shall contact the agencies that offer scholarships to Omani citizens and inform them of the government's desire that these scholarships are not granted to any Omani citizen except through its offices in accordance with the requirements of this law.

The wording of the legislation included a statement, repeated four times, referring to destructive principles that conflicted with the teachings of Islam. It meant that if a student adopted Communist Socialist principles – which were the basis on which the separatist movement operated in the south of the country – then the Omani government would cancel the scholarship and the student would be required to reimburse all the expenses incurred up to that date.

With regard to this law, it should be noted that government employees were paid an allowance in addition to their educational expenses, that is, the full basic salary if married, or half of the basic salary if single. Today, in addition to the scholarship, they receive the full salary, an expense account and other monthly and annual allowances. At the beginning of the 1970s it was probably the lack of hard currency which restricted the financial assistance available from the government.

The Sultan pursued his interest in all the various aspects of government employment. In 1975, in his speech during the Fourth National Day celebrations, he referred to the formation of a Scholarships Committee:

And to protect our future scholarships students abroad, we have decided to form a permanent committee to examine their various responsibilities and look after their needs. This committee will, at frequent intervals, visit the countries where the students are studying, to ensure that they are not confronted by problems or obstacles that could hinder their studies. (Ministry of Information, 1995: 75)

These visits undertaken by the Scholarships Committee to reassure itself about the students' living and studying conditions in foreign countries helped to promote

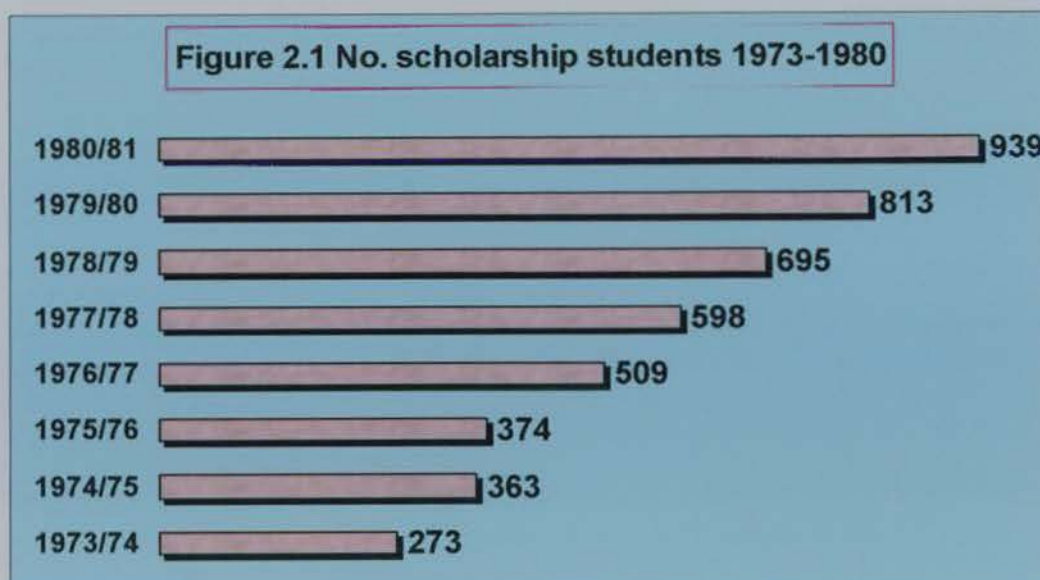
stability and consequently the best possible educational achievement. This was particularly important at that time in view of the lack of cultural attachés at the Omani Embassies abroad, who were to take charge of supervising the students in later years.

In 1977 Royal Decree No. 22/77 was issued to amend some of the regulations covering scholarships and student grants. Among the changes was the restructuring of the Scholarships Committee. It was now under the direction of the Minister of Education with memberships comprising the Ministry's Under-Secretary and other responsible employees of that Ministry without any representation from other ministries and organizations (Royal Decree no. 22/77).

The removal of the representatives of other government departments and organizations from the Scholarships Committee was not a wise step to take. Those representatives had a great knowledge of the needs of their departments from the graduates of university scholarships, particularly the specialized skills required by the national labour market. By pursuing this policy, the government found itself in the mid-1990s face to face with the problem of unemployment among university graduates in humanities when the country was still in great and continual need of graduates with degrees in the sciences.

2.4.1 Increase in the Number of Scholarship Students

In 1970 the number of state school pupils did not exceed 909, all of whom were male. Ten years later, the number of students, male and female, studying at universities abroad had reached 939. The breakdown of the statistics over ten years is shown in Figure 2.1.



Source: Ministry of Education, 1992.

This significant increase in the availability of education indicates the concern of the government with the development of young Omanis, particularly their ability to absorb the present and search for a future with greater possibilities of growth and prosperity. According to Figure 2.1, close attention began to be given to scholarships only in 1973, after the new government had been in power for three years. This impression is supported by the numerous government sources which provide statistics dating from the time when the registration of scholarships was inaugurated. Nevertheless, it does not mean that government and individual scholarships did not exist prior to 1973, reference to which has already been made in the preceding pages. Table 2.1 shows the numbers of scholarship students from 1973 to 1980.

2.5 Teacher-Training Courses

Meanwhile the number of state schools was expanding rapidly in cities and villages throughout the country and the roll of pupils doubled. This situation increased the need to hire expatriate teachers from other parts of the Arab world, such as Egypt,

Jordan and the Sudan. At the time, education specialists in Oman realized the importance of providing pre-service and in-service training courses for Omani teachers, for they were more knowledgeable about the requirements of Omani children and had a greater understanding of local customs.

2.5.1 In-Service Teacher-Training

The first stage of providing in-service teacher-training was begun in 1972/73, when the Ministry of Education – in the light of advice from UNESCO experts – organized two-year training courses for Omani teachers who were already employed. The aim was to raise the standard of Omani teachers who were not qualified in education (Ministry of Development, 1974: 10). Despite the low qualifications of those teachers, they did contribute, in one way or another, to creating a positive attitude among their fellow Omanis towards the teaching profession in state schools.

Another of the aims of the government's education policy was to upgrade the qualifications of managers and education supervisors in the Ministry of Education and in the educational establishments affiliated to the ministries and other government bodies such as the Ministries of Defence, and Social Work and Employment.

Table 2.1 Numbers of scholarship students 1973–80

Year	Total	Specialization							
		Medicine & Pharmacy	Engineering & Sciences	Agriculture	Arts	Law	Commerce	Politics & Economics	Others
1973	273	26	60	4	42	23	51	15	52
1974	363	35	39	6	34	23	49	24	153
1975	374	55	101	10	34	13	42	43	73
1976	509	55	164	12	51	13	66	56	92
1977	598	63	172	8	62	15	101	58	119
1978	695	68	180	7	56	13	141	62	168
1979	813	58	241	5	66	13	146	91	193
1980	939	65	256	15	99	24	200	73	207

Source: Ministry of Education.

The programmes under this scheme came to an end in 1986/87 (ʿIsān, 1995: 160), when Sultan Qaboos University was opened.

Between 1973 and 1980, a total of 399 male and female teachers benefited from this programme (Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983: 53). Perhaps it was a small number in proportion to the total of 606 Omani teachers employed in schools in 1980/81. This figure represented only 11 per cent of the total number of teachers, of whom Egyptian nationals alone represented 61.6 per cent (al-Manthri, 1992: 15).

2.5.2 Pre-Service Teacher-Training

Soon after coming to power, Sultan Qaboos's government made rapid efforts to train Omani teachers to take charge of all levels of general education in both state and private schools. The government's policy was implemented in stages, beginning with the in-service training of teachers who were not qualified in education. In 1975/76 the First Programme was established, in which those achieving the first Preparatory Certificate could study for two years before continuing in teaching. However, this programme was closed after the one and only batch of 25 teachers had qualified (ʿIsān, 1995: 45).

In 1976 Ministerial Decision No. 81 was issued for the establishment of institutes for the training of male and female teachers who had achieved the General Preparatory Certificate. Trainee teachers would follow a three-year course that would qualify them to teach the elementary stage comprising all classes and general subjects (Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983: 51). The number of students in these teacher-training institutes in Muscat did not exceed 64 in the first academic year, eventually rising to 597 in 1981/82 after the establishment of branch

institutions for teachers employed in the secondary schools in Nizwa, Salalah, Sohar and Sur. Enrolment was boosted by the inducement of monthly maintenance grants which students received either during their studies or after being employed in education.

In 1979/80 another addition was made to the system. Secondary school leavers trained for one year in these institutes were qualified to teach a particular level at elementary school.

One may well wonder what could be expected from these teacher-training programmes. How much did the students absorb concerning teaching in general and teaching methods in particular, and to what extent were they enabled to instruct school pupils in the various subjects?

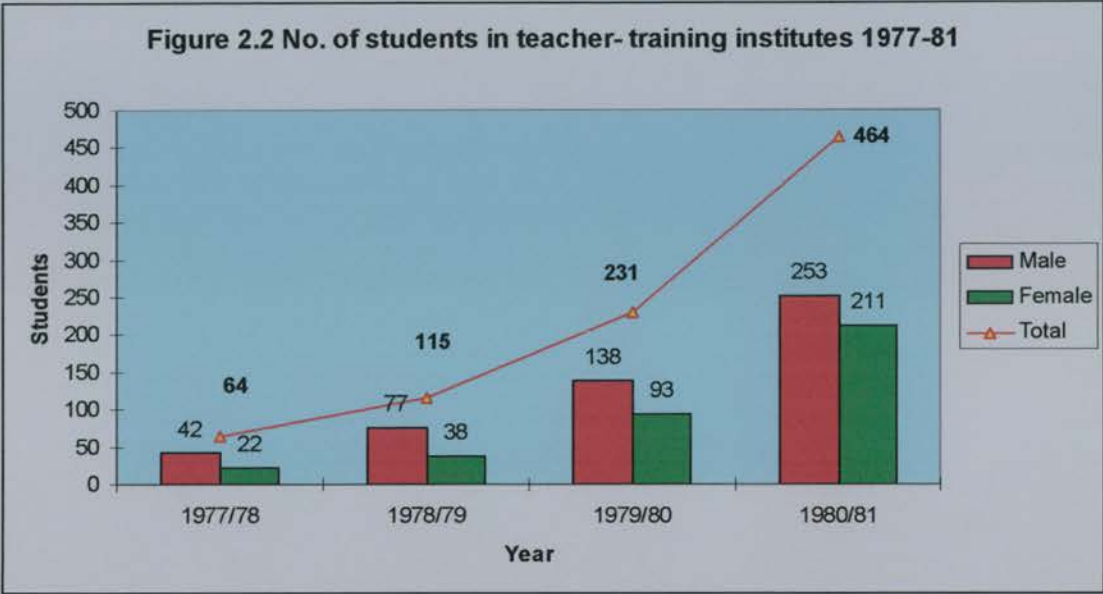
The fact that those who qualified after taking these teacher-training courses were only 18 years old and that their training did not raise them to university level were two important factors that cast a shadow on the standard of these teachers and their vocational capacity. Those responsible for teaching in the Sultanate took these points into consideration when upgrading the teacher-training system to the level of diploma and baccalaureate. This is the subject of discussion in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.5.3 Increase in Trainee Teachers

In 1980/81, four years after the beginning of the pre-service teacher-training programme (comprising three years after completion of the preparatory stage), enrolment consisted of 464 students, of whom 211 or 45.5 per cent were female. Figure 2.2 and Table 2.2 show the increase in numbers over the period.

One of the aims of the teacher-training institutes was to increase the proportion of Omani teachers in the primary stage from 10 to 60 per cent by the end of the

government's second Five-Year Plan for the period 1981 to 1985. The expansion of primary education throughout the Sultanate meant that qualified teachers could find employment near home owing to the large number of vacancies available.



Source: Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983.

Table 2.2 No. of students in teachers-training institutes
1977/1978 to 1980/1981

Year	No. of Students		Total
	Male	Female	
1977/78	42	22	64
1978/79	77	38	115
1979/80	138	93	231
1980/81	253	211	464

Source: Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs, 1983.

However, the teacher-training institutes and then the intermediate teacher-training colleges became so successful that there was a surplus of primary school teachers and local posts were more difficult to find.

2.6 Vocational Training

Before the 1970s, Oman lacked many of the basic services and infrastructure of modern life. In particular, it was in urgent need of technical skills to use and maintain modern mechanical, electrical and electronic machinery and instruments. The government's concern with the matter was aroused by the discovery of oil in 1967. The Petroleum Development Company of Oman undertook to establish in Muscat a centre for the training of Omani nationals in administrative and technical skills so as to qualify them for employment in the new oil refineries (Daḥāwī & Ḥsān, 1997: 4). The centre created new employment opportunities of which the Omanis had previously been unaware. The increase in oil discoveries in the Sultanate led to a growing interest in training for employment in the oil companies, which reached a peak in the late 1980s with the availability of university courses in oil and gas engineering.

In 1971, according to certain sources (Ministry of Development, 1974: 11), the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour took over the responsibility of administering the school originally established by the Petroleum Development Company of Oman in Mutrah for training students in mechanical engineering. From 1973 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour began offering professional training courses at preparatory level. The total number of students following these courses reached 949 in 1980/81 (Ministry of Information and Youth Affairs, 1980: 82).

With regard to the regulation of vocational training in Oman, in 1975 Royal Decree No. 22/75 was issued for the establishment of a Vocational Training Council to study the nation's training requirements for its work-force and compile appropriate training programmes. The establishment of the Council was undertaken by the Ministries of Social Affairs and Employment, and Trade and Industry, as well as representatives of the private sector (al-Shanfri, 1991: 146–148). However, in 1977 a formal Education and Vocational Training Council was formed in accordance with Royal Decree No. 43/77, which carries out the following functions:

1. The establishment of political aims for education, linking them with the aims and ethos of professional training and the requirements for the national economy in each developmental plan.
2. The initiation of a programme for the implementation of these aims for each developmental plan and the presentation of the programme to the Development Council.
3. The distribution of resources according to the needs of education and vocational training.
4. The continuation of the implementation of education and vocational training programmes.

The initial steps taken by the government to implement certain laws concerning education and vocational training were progressing well. The efficacy of the measures was enhanced by the personal supervision of the President, Sultan Qaboos, of the organization of the Council of Education and Vocational Training (Royal Decree no. 4/78). In 1979 the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment undertook the creation and development of three training centres: two in Muscat and

one in Sur. Two types of training were available in these centres: a commercial course linked to the Secretariat, including accountancy and typing; and a technical course including the elements of building, commerce, interior design, electrical and mechanical engineering. The Ministry of Education established several commercial, industrial and agricultural schools (al-Shanfri, 1991: 148), with the aim of fulfilling some of the nation's requirements for a work-force trained in various fields.

Despite the attention given by the government to vocational training, it is notable that most of the students who enrolled in this sector had low academic standards. After qualifying, many of them did not take up the employment for which they had been trained, instead preferring office work, in which vacancies were plentiful at that time. This resulted in a poor return for the vocational training programmes, which finally persuaded the government to close down a number of them. On the other hand, however, the government – as will be seen in the discussion of the policies of the 1980s – proceeded to upgrade selected programmes to the level of intermediate technical colleges in the light of the continuing global development in this field.

It remains to point out that vocational training in Oman was not upgraded to intermediate or university level until the beginning of the 1980s, owing to the urgency of including as many professions and skills as possible which were needed by the country, as in the case of teacher-training.

2.7 Health Education

In 1970 the first course in nursing was established with the help of the American Mission in al-Rahmah Hospital in Mutrah. Only five students enrolled in the first instance and they qualified in 1972. Up to 1981 the total number of nurses qualifying

on this course was 83 (Ministry of Health, 1998: 2). The American Mission helped to establish health care in the Sultanate prior to the 1970s. However, it was limited to Muscat and Mutrah, except on the few occasions when the Mission sent a visiting doctor to treat the sick in other areas. Among the work carried out by the Mission in Muscat was the continuation of the nursing course in tandem with the limited provision of education, which the government closed down at the end of the 1970s.

The year 1971 saw the completion of a programme to upgrade the medical laboratories at Khula Hospital to the required technical standard, which was then applied to al-Nahda Hospital. Until 1979 the courses of study at these two hospitals lasted two years. Now, however, the government adopted a new academic syllabus lasting three and a half years to conform to international standards (Ministry of Health, 1998: 3).

The emphasis placed by the modern nation in its early years on the establishment of universal basic education, which was not available before the 1970s, limited the amount of attention that could be given to training courses for qualifications. The latter could not be given their rightful priority until the foundations of the necessary educational attainments had been laid. Therefore, the government depended to a large extent on the expatriate work-force in the health sector.

2.8 Omani National Committee for Education, Science & Culture

Among the legislation during the 1970s covering basic and higher education was the establishment of a National Omani Committee of UNESCO in 1974 (Royal Decree no. 5/74). This was followed by amendments to its procedures in 1977 (Royal Decree

31/77), and the Committee was renamed the Omani National Committee for Education, Science and Culture (Royal decree no. 2/79). It comprises members of the ministries and committees as well as individuals concerned with education, culture and science. The Committee's work links between the following three organizations – the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), and the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (IESCO) and the other departments and organizations of the nation as well as concerned individuals in the promotion of educational and scientific development (Ministry of Education, 2002).

The three international organizations and UNICEF played an important role in initiating and improving many of the growth programmes in Oman during the 1970s, such as the eradication of illiteracy, the promotion of adult education, the teaching of Arabic to non-native speakers, and in-service teacher-training. From one year to the next, the international organizations sent their specialists to help the Omani government to compile and implement similar programmes.

In addition, the Omani Ministry of Education signed agreements with a number of international organizations for the financing of certain projects and educational programmes. Among them was an agreement with the World Bank and UNESCO for a project to establish a teachers' institute in Muscat. Its function would be to develop syllabuses and educational technology, and to train teachers in new methods and modern trends in education (Ministry of Development, 1974: 12).

2.9 Conclusion

The following conclusions can be drawn regarding the status of higher education in the 1970s:

1. The Sultanate was dependent on educated expatriates in both the state and private sectors in view of the lack of suitably qualified nationals during that time. This is what Sultan Qaboos highlighted in his first address to the nation. Basic education was rapidly made available throughout the country to enable the Omanis to govern themselves, thus indicating the importance of teaching in the independence and growth of the nation.
2. The scholarships sector played a significant role in maximizing the size of the qualified national work-force by sending a number of Omanis to study abroad. The government had rapidly become efficient in the organization and management of scholarships, by allocating them to the Ministry of Education as the sole organizer in sending students and employees abroad, so as to avoid any conflict of interests. Restrictions were placed on certain external scholarships which the government did not regard as serving the interests of the country's development.
3. The teacher-training courses for the Omanis were among the early priorities pursued by the Ministry of Education. Although the courses were not upgraded to university level, nevertheless their existence was important at a time when large numbers of teachers were urgently needed for all stages of general education in the state schools, which had multiplied rapidly throughout the country, after having been limited to Muscat.
4. In view of the nation's lack of a trained work-force in both the state and private sector at the beginning of the 1970s, the government swiftly established vocational training centres offering a range of commercial and technical courses. The courses at these centres were not upgraded to university level because

teaching in Oman was confined to the elementary stages, and such a high level of training was not needed by the state at that time.

5. The lack of health education in the 1970s was no worse than the lack of other kinds of teaching in the Sultanate. Health education was limited to the course in nursing run by the American Mission, and to a course in the medical laboratories of two hospitals. Probably the concern of the Ministry of Health at the time with the distribution of health care throughout the country was greater than training the personnel of the health units in hospital and medical dispensaries.
6. International organizations specializing in the affairs of education, women and children provided much guidance and teaching in the Sultanate by participating in a number of advisory, financial and executive government projects that were achieved during the 1970s. The government's understanding of the role played by these international organizations helped in the development of education later, especially higher education, which was the target of indefatigable efforts in the 1980s and 1990s, as will be discussed in the following pages.

Chapter Three

Establishment & Development 1981–1990

Introduction

The 1970s are considered the period when the Omani government took the first steps to introducing higher education in the country. However, the educational policy was not fully formulated and implemented until the following decade. This chapter will examine the government's interest in this project, improvements to and expansion of the educational system as well as educational trends between 1981 and 1990. Particular attention will be given to the establishment of Sultan Qaboos University, the intermediate teacher-training colleges, technical industrial college, institute of health sciences, institutes of Shari'ah law and the introduction of scholarships to enable Omanis to study at foreign universities.

3.1 Sultan Qaboos University

It should be noted that institutions of higher education are a recent phenomenon in the Arab World, for 65 per cent of Arab universities were established between 1981 and 1998. The reasons for the sudden increase were the improvement in economic prosperity in the regions as a result of the higher revenues from oil production, a significant growth in the human population and the society's demand for higher education.

In the Arab countries, universities were first established in the capital cities and main towns, and then in the provincial towns of the more remote areas so as to widen the base of higher education to create employment and to reduce migration to

the principal cities. Oman took the first step in this direction when Sultan Qaboos issued an order on the tenth National Day in 1980 to establish a university in Nizwa, 125 miles from the capital of Muscat. By the eleventh National Day of 1981, the plans for the university had been approved (Ministry of Information, 1995: 168 & 187). The project was designed to meet the needs of the increasing number of school pupils, which totalled 108,324 in the academic year 1980/81 (Ministry of National Economy, 1999: 525).

The idea of establishing this university was based on the following factors. Rising profits from oil revenues led to an improvement in Oman's economic stability after the defeat of the separatists in the south of the country. There was clearly a need to provide a national institution at the highest level to reduce the number of students who were otherwise obliged to study abroad and were thus exposed to cultural and ideological influences at an impressionable age. Oman was also following the trend of the spread of higher education in the neighbouring countries.

Nizwa was chosen for this project for many reasons. The town is located in the centre of Oman. It has an important symbolic significance, for a university in it would establish a scientific institution in a leading historic centre. This is an example of the link between tradition and modernity, an approach adopted by the Omani government in its policies affecting many aspects of modern life in the country. This idea is discussed later in the thesis. In his speech at the Festival of the twenty-fourth National Day, which was held in Nizwa, Sultan Qaboos described it as a town of history, knowledge and heritage. He emphasized its distinguished role in the creation of Oman's civilization, complementing its intellectuals, poets, writers and great leaders (Sultan Qaboos, 1994).

After the Sultan's declaration of the establishment of a university, a committee of experts from Oman and elsewhere was formed, headed by the ex-Minister of Education. In a statement to the *Shura* Council on 26 October 1992, the Minister of Education (who later became the Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University) pointed out that the founding committee members were selected from various ministries that had links with the subjects of study in the University colleges, namely the Ministries of Health, Education, and Agriculture and Fisheries. The committee specified the subjects of study in each college according to the needs of the Ministries and public institutions, thus reflecting the ideas and recommendations of the subcommittees established for that purpose (al-Manthri, 1992: 42).

It should be noted that the committee ought to have included representatives of other important ministries, who could have enriched the project with relevant ideas and proposals. Examples are the Ministries of Oil and Minerals, Commerce and Industry, Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, the Civil Service, and National Heritage and Culture. Though the last three Ministries were represented later on the University Board, the role of the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals or Commerce and Industry was not considered, despite the fact that oil revenues constitute the highest proportion of Oman's gross domestic product (GDP). In their first seminar held in Bahrain from 4 to 7 January 1982, the Chancellors of the Gulf universities had recommended strengthening the link between universities and domestic industry for two reasons: (1) to contribute to the improvement and growth of domestic industry; and (2) to reduce the large proportion of expatriates in vocational and technical employment in the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC)

countries (estimated to be more than 83 per cent in 1985) by replacing them with suitably trained nationals of the Gulf states. (Mursī, 1985: 140, 205).

The initial and most important step in achieving these aims would have been to include representatives of Oman's domestic industry in the planning and development of educational and research programmes in accordance with the country's labour needs. Domestic industry would have had the benefit of a locally trained labour force, and university graduates the benefit of increased employment opportunities. In addition, the universities could have been used by industry and other public and private bodies as centres of academic and technical research and development. This would have contributed to improving and expanding both production processes and finished products as well as providing graduates with opportunities for postgraduate research.

Unfortunately, these aims were not fully achieved during the early years, although a few representatives of the service and production sectors joined the University Board at later stages, thus partly bridging a gap that should never have existed at all.

Later on, those concerned thought that it would be better to establish the university in al-Khod, a suburb of Muscat, instead of Nizwa. It was argued that the need for large quantities of water for more than ten thousand people as well as for agriculture and gardens ruled Nizwa out as a site for the university because the town lacked the required resources, being largely dependent on rainfall. Since this would be the first state university in Oman, it was felt that the capital city of Muscat, the decision-making centre, would be a more suitable location.

Sultan Qaboos University was finally established in al-Khod, 33 miles from Muscat. The campus is located on a large site, away from residential areas, where there is space for future expansion (Damluji, 1998: 118). Like any university campus with more than twenty thousand residents and daily visitors, Sultan Qaboos University has been provided with many facilities including shops, banks, restaurants, clinics, playgrounds, sport centres and a police station.

The decision to locate the University on its present site may have been based on security. This reason is said to have been part of the thinking behind locating the universities of Jordan and Tunisia at some distance from the capital cities of Amman and Tunis. It is known that at times student bodies take part in action that might be construed to be anti-government or anti-establishment. The security forces can deal with the situation more effectively if the student body is isolated from the rest of the population. It seems that the Omani government took a lesson from the experience of other countries that witnessed significant political change, which originated in the universities.

3.1.1 The Aims of the University

The Royal Decree regarding University Law No. 9/1986 stated the aims of the University as follows:

- Educating Omani students by making them fully aware of their Islamic and Arab cultural heritage as well as strengthening their religious faith and patriotism.
- Educating Omani students in both academic and technical fields and in self-reliance as well as training them to serve their country.
- Maintaining the Omani identity and protecting its social and moral values.

- Encouraging research in the sciences, social sciences and the humanities. The aim of this research should be to foster intellectual achievement both inside and outside Oman.
- Playing a direct and effective role in realizing the social and economic development of Omani society by the improvement in productivity and the careful exploitation of natural resources.
- Assisting local society in finding appropriate solutions to its cultural, social and economic problems.
- Exchanging expertise and establishing solid cultural and academic links with Arab and non-Arab universities and other educational institutions.

(Sultan Qaboos University, 1997).

The aim of the University is that it should be the meeting-point of politics, philosophy, education, and the challenges of life and society (Waṭṭa, 1998: 105).

An examination of these aims shows that they are largely being achieved at Sultan Qaboos University. At the political level, loyalty to the country and the Sultan is emphasized. This has reduced the possibility of political dissent among young Omanis. Philosophy is represented by the awareness of the Islamic and Arab cultural heritage. In education, the identity of Omani society is maintained. Scientific research is encouraged so as to improve intellectual ability and raise living standards. Finally, the challenges of life and society are met by working out appropriate solutions to cultural, social and economic problems. Thus the three main goals (education, research and public service) recommended for modern universities by higher education specialists have been served by the University (al-Tal, 1997: 102–104).

3.1.2 The University between Tradition and Modernity

Sultan Qaboos inaugurated the University on 9 November 1986 in the presence of the administrative and academic staff and the first intake of students. The opening was also attended by delegations from other countries. The Sultan talked about the planning of the University and the policies implemented in its establishment. He pointed out that no specific model was adopted, but rather, all the positive aspects of modern academic systems were incorporated into a structure suitable for Omani society and reflecting its identity. (Sultan Qaboos, 1986)

The design of the University building has also reflected Omani political insight. Unlike other universities in the region, where male staff and students are segregated from female staff and students or where there are separate colleges for men and women, Sultan Qaboos University has dealt with this issue in a totally different way. The policy adopted shows the attitude of Omani society, in which men and women have worked closely together in all aspects of life since ancient times. This type of co-operation has inspired people to adhere to the principles of respect, appreciation and modesty. The University buildings have been designed with common areas – classrooms, laboratories and workshops – where academic and technical staff and students of both sexes work together. However, men and women are segregated in the study areas of the libraries, the hostels and their refectories, and the sports centres. The University also has upper-level corridors for female students, which link all the colleges and centres on the campus.

Despite the expected negative aspects of this design, its success has been proved over the past years. This can be seen when a female graduate has adapted well to various working environments without any embarrassment as she has grown

in self-confidence during the course of her studies. It has also prepared conservative Omani society to accept the idea of men and women working together while still having mutual respect.

On entering the University, one is struck by the combination of tradition and modernity in the architectural design of the buildings. One can see arches, domes and towers. The administration block, for example, has typical Omani doors encased with copper and ornamental engraving, which harmonize with electronic glass doors and modern furniture. There is also the Roman amphitheatre on the summit of a hill overlooking the administration buildings, the large mosque with minarets and huge domes, and the high University tower that can be seen from beyond the campus. The last is ornamented with numerous inscriptions from the Qur'an.

There is harmony among all the premises: the desert, the hills and the green gardens, and the traditional architecture, such as the mosque and the campus corridors, the latter resembling the ancient *aflaj* or irrigation canals. All these aspects constitute a model of the Arab Islamic city, which was sought by the University designers (Damluji, 1998, 118–125).

An examination of the courses shows that they too incorporate tradition and modernity. In parallel with modern sciences courses, students are required to take courses in the history of Oman, human civilization, Omani society and Arab literature and culture.

Extra-curricular activities also follow the principle of combining the traditional and the modern. Cultural activities include traditional and modern poetry, traditional and modern handicrafts, drawing, sculpture, photography, drama and

traditional art. In the field of religious activities, there are seminars and lectures (Othman, 1997: 186–206).

3.1.3 The Administrative Structure of the University

The University is administered according to the legislation issued in the Royal Decree No. 9/86 and its executive regulations, under which the University Council is the highest authority. It is headed by the Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs, who has since become the Deputy Prime Minister for Cabinet Affairs. The Deputy Head is the Minister of Education, who was then appointed University Chancellor and Chair of the University Council. Later, he was appointed Minister of Higher Education. The members of the Council are as follows: the Ministers of National Heritage and Culture; Agriculture and Fisheries; Health; Legal Affairs; Social Affairs; the Minister for the Civil Service; the General Secretary of the University Council and the University Secretary.

The members of the Academic Council of the University – which is chaired by the Chancellor of the University – are the deans of the colleges, the Dean of Student Affairs, and the directors of centres such as the Language Centre, the Audio-Visual Aids Centre and the Main Library. The Academic Council has the following responsibilities:

1. Proposing terms of admission and regulations for new students and those transferred from other institutions.
2. Preparing and administering tests and examination syllabuses.
3. Organizing student activities.
4. Devising a student disciplinary system.
5. Proposing the establishment, merger or closure of a college.

6. Drawing up the general policy for postgraduate studies, scholarships and training courses.
7. Reviewing recommendations made by the boards of various colleges.
8. Working towards strengthening the links with educational institutions, government bodies and the private sector, both nationally and internationally.
9. Assessing all the University's activities from annual reports and making the relevant recommendations.
10. Compiling the University's academic calendar.
11. Approving the publication of research and studies sponsored by the University.

(Sultan Qaboos University, 1986: 4-5)

The Chancellor has the role of supervising the administration of the University's affairs and he is its external representative. He is in charge of the following:

1. The issuing of decrees regarding the University's rules and regulations.
2. The proposing of amendments to the administrative structure and their presentation to the University Council for approval.
3. The official appointment of teaching staff, directors of the Library and other centres as well as other special grade members of staff, following the University Council's approval of nominations submitted by the Academic Council.
4. The official promotion, secondment and transfer of teaching staff, directors of centres and other special grade members of staff, following approval by the University Council.
5. The official appointment, promotion and secondment of staff of other grades and the termination of their contracts.

6. The issuing of invitations to visiting professors, following nomination by college boards or recommendations made by the Academic Council.
7. The partial or total suspension of studies, with the approval of the University Council.
8. The delegating of those duties that can be legally delegated to his Deputy or either of the two General Secretaries.

(Sultan Qaboos University, 1986: 7–8)

The above duties and responsibilities of the Chancellor of the University are clearly numerous and diverse. This type of centralized administration was particularly important in the early stages of the University for the following reasons:

1. The Omani members of administrative staff were inexperienced in the administration of higher education.
2. The majority, if not all, of the college deans and heads of academic and technical departments were non-Omani. This required direct and double monitoring of the educational system by the senior administrative staff.
3. The aim was to ensure the smooth management of all academic, technical, financial and administrative affairs of the University during its early stages.

The University Assistant for Academic Affairs is a post included in the University Regulations issued in 1986 and is filled by a Royal Decree. His duties include:

1. Assisting the Chancellor in all academic issues.
2. Proposing plans for the development of the colleges at the academic level.
3. Suggesting ways of establishing and strengthening scientific and cultural links with universities, higher education institutions and other scientific bodies.

3.1.4 The University Colleges

The University comprises the following seven colleges:

1. Education and Islamic Sciences
2. Science
3. Medicine
4. Engineering
5. Agriculture
6. Arts
7. Commerce and Economics (the latest to be established)

Each college has a number of departments. There are also colleges boards and departmental boards, which are responsible for monitoring all academic, cultural, social and financial affairs (Sultan Qaboos University, 1986: 13–16).

3.1.5 Terms of Student Admission

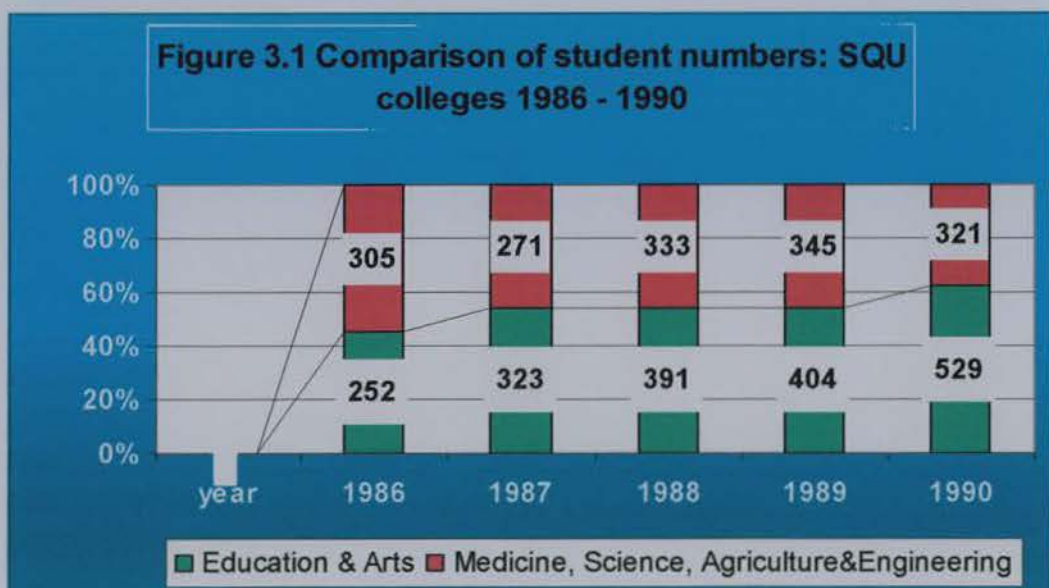
According to Article No. 60 of the University Regulations issued in 1986, the Academic Council suggests the number of students that can be admitted to each college at the beginning of the academic year. The proposal is presented to the University Council for approval (Sultan Qaboos University, 1986: 51).

Article 61 of the University Regulations states the terms of admission, some of which are as follows:

1. The minimum acceptable pass rate in the Secondary School Certificate, or any equivalent certificate, is 65 per cent. Priority is given to applicants with the highest pass rates. This proportion may change from year to year according to the general pass rate in the schools and the capacity of the University.
2. Applicants should meet the specialization requirements.

3. Applicants should be recent school leavers.
4. Applicants should pass the oral interview.
5. The age of the applicants should not exceed 25.

It should be noted that the minimum acceptable pass rate of 65 per cent for admission was possibly applied for the first two years (1986 and 1987) after the establishment of the University. Since then it has been raised, owing to the doubling of the number of school leavers, to 98 per cent for admission to the College of Medicine and no less than 90 per cent for the other colleges. The University had to impose these extremely high requirements owing to the limited capacity of the institution and the increase in the number of students in certain colleges. This was particularly noticeable in the Colleges of Education and Arts, whose student populations were markedly higher than those of the other colleges, as shown in Figure 3.1 and Table 3.1



Source: University Annual Statistics 1997/98.

Table 3.1 Comparison of student numbers: SQU colleges 1986–1990

Colleges of Education & Arts			Colleges of Medicine, Engineering, Science & Agriculture		
Year	No. of students	%age	No. of students	%age	Total
1986	252	45.2	305	54.8	557
1987	323	56.6	271	43.4	624
1988	391	54.0	333	46.0	724
1989	404	54.0	345	46.0	749
1990	529	62.2	321	37.8	850
Total	1,929	55.0	1,575	45.0	3,504

Source: University Annual Statistics 1997/98.

This unusual situation raised several important questions, for example:

1. What is the aim of admitting a higher number of students to Humanities courses, whereas most of the University colleges and departments cater for science subjects?
2. What is the purpose of establishing and running departments fully equipped with physical and human resources to cater for only a small number of students, as in the Colleges of Agriculture and Art?
3. To what extent is the pass mark in the Secondary School Certificate valid and objective? There are a number of students who obtained a high pass mark at school and who enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine. However, they were transferred to other colleges at a later stage, or they were unable to continue their studies. For the latter reason, the University issued them with BSc certificates in

Medical Science at the end of the fourth year of the programme, although some of them had not achieved that level despite having studied for more than five or six years.

Admission requirement No. 3 above, stating that applicants must be recent school leavers, contradicts the UNESCO principle of its medium-term plan between 1984 and 1989, which gives everyone the right to an education (Pickas,1987: 33). Despite this, the University had to admit high numbers of applicants although its capacity was limited.

Table 3.2 No. of students admitted and graduated: 1986–1990

Year	Students Admitted			Students Graduated		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1986	*	*	557	—	—	—
1987	*	*	624	—	—	—
1988	*	*	724	—	—	—
1989	402	347	749	—	—	—
1990	417	433	850	160	123	283

Note: *Precise data are not available.
Source: University Annual Statistics 1997/98.

Table 3.2 shows the number of students admitted and graduated between 1986 and 1990. The table shows that there is an annual increase in the number of students admitted, although it is a restricted increase and does not absorb the vast number of secondary school leavers, which totalled 5,669 in 1990/91 (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999). It is also noted that the exact numbers of male and female students are not given for the academic years 1986 to 1988. This is a debatable issue, for it reflects a lack of interest in recording this important information, especially during the initial stages of the first university to be established in the country.

3.1.6 The Academic Programme

The academic year is divided into two terms, each consisting of 15 weeks in addition to the examination period. There is also a summer course of 7 weeks (Sultan Qaboos University, 1995: 6). The University applies the credit hour system, otherwise known as the “American system”. To graduate, a student has to fulfil the following requirements:

1. University requirements: The minimum number of credit hours is 18, including Arabic, English, Omani Society, Omani and Islamic Culture and other optional courses.
2. College and specialization requirements: These are distributed among the four academic years according to each specialization.
3. All requirements are to be completed with a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 2. (Sultan Qaboos University, 1997a: 4)

The University adopted a flexible policy with the first intake of students in meeting the third condition that is, obtaining a GPA of 2 at the initial stages of the course. The reason for this might have been that the system was new and still on trial, or that the University, as a new institution of higher education, wished to help the students overcome the difficulties entailed in reaching that target and so expedite their graduation. It is possible that this was the main reason behind the flexibility in applying the third requirement above.

Later on, when the systems and academic programmes were consistent, the University applied this condition strictly. The change was influenced by the requirements of public and private institutions, which put great emphasis on a high standard of education. Some of these institutions, such as the Petroleum

Development of Oman and the Ministry of Petroleum and Minerals, requested employment seekers to obtain a high GPA if they were interested in securing a position with them. This requirement made the former University Council Chairman raise the matter with the parties concerned. Sultan Qaboos himself gave the matter his attention. He issued directives to public and private organizations to bear the students in mind and to offer plans and sound practical programmes to assist them in fulfilling the requirements of the posts available (Sultan Qaboos, 1991).

On many occasions, especially when meeting citizens during his annual tour of the country, Sultan Qaboos stressed that the high standards of the University should not be compromised. He used to point out that the holder of a certificate was not sufficiently qualified unless he also had an effective knowledge that enabled him to make a positive contribution to the development of society. In his meeting with University students in May 2000, the Sultan again stressed the idea of quality, and this has been taken very seriously by the University, which had been planned as a unique institution of higher education. Consequently, there has been a strict implementation of the policy of admitting only the best of the applicants for University places (Ministry of Information, 2000: 12).

I was fortunate enough to be employed in the office of the University Chancellor from 1994 to 1998. In Chapter 4 I shall describe the obstacles that faced the University in its application of this policy.

3.2 Teacher-Training

Teacher-training and qualification have been given an extraordinary amount of attention by government officials, for this profession is vital to every society and contributes to the culture, knowledge, ethics and intellectual development of every

individual. Since the citizens of a country are the mainstay of its working sector, owing to their prior knowledge of its society, and since education is one of the important supports of a country's sovereignty, the government aimed at Omanizing the profession from the beginning. The holders of the Intermediate School Certificate were given the opportunity to enrol in a two-year training programme, after which they could teach at the primary stage. This programme was upgraded to the secondary stage and then to teacher-training institutes.

3.2.1 Teacher-Training Institutes

In 1979/80 the teacher-training institutes began training teachers to qualify for teaching all six grades of the primary stage. This meant that the emphasis continued to be placed on Omanizing the profession at the primary stage by all possible means, without considering their effectiveness and relevance to the teachers who qualified. The aim was to expedite the Omanization of the profession, which is a valid objective for countries such as Oman seeking a distinct position in the world.

There were two systems of teacher-training programmes: a three-year course for the holders of the Intermediate School Certificate and a one-year course for the holders of the Secondary School Certificate. The trainees were required to study scientific, literary, educational and vocational subjects as well as to undergo practical training (·İsān, 1995: 45).

Graduates of these teacher-training institutes were expected to teach all the subjects at every level of the primary stage, which required a sound and varied knowledge. This type of "class teacher" had existed since ancient times in the Arab world and had to be well acquainted with many subjects, including religion, history, literature and mathematics. Nowadays this has become almost impossible, owing to

the rapid expansion of every field of knowledge. It is therefore difficult to specialize in several subjects and keep abreast of all the new developments in them. This situation induced the Ministry of Education to establish in-service training programmes as well as to upgrade the current standard of the teachers by enrolling them in training programmes designed to lead to higher qualifications.

The three-year teacher-training programme required 40 hours of study per week. It included subjects such as Islamic culture, Arabic, English, mathematics, general science, school health and nutrition, social studies, arts, teaching aids, music, physical training, theoretical education, practical education and social development (Abdullah, 1984: 17). One could well ask how a student of 15 could acquire such a vast amount of information and apply it as a teacher. In addition to the general programme, there were two specializations: English language, and Islamic and Arabic studies.

The number of graduates from this course totalled 2,521, of whom 1,146 or 45.5 per cent were female (Īsān, 1995: 46). This percentage is particularly significant, for it indicates the government's keen interest in educating women and giving them the same civil rights and privileges as those of men since the early days of the country's modern development. The role of women has grown to include a range of development programmes. Women have been given the opportunity to occupy senior positions in different sectors such as the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, Foreign Affairs, and Social Affairs and Labour. They have also participated as members of the *Shura* and State Councils.

3.2.2 Intermediate Teacher-Training Colleges

After a series of trainees had graduated and entered the teaching profession, research showed that such young teachers were finding it difficult to adapt to their new situation. This was especially marked in their relationship with the pupils, as well as with other older, more experienced teachers, most of whom were non-Omanis. The fact that these young teachers were playing football with their pupils, only slightly younger than themselves, caused a loss of respect for them as teachers and had a poor influence on their teaching performance

As ʿĪsān pointed out, as a result of developments in modern education, practice had proved that such a system was unsuitable for training Omani teachers to the required level (ʿĪsān 1995: 46). The Minister of Education himself highlighted the problem in a statement to the *Shura* Council (al-Manthri, 1992: 5, 19). He declared that the teacher-training institutes were clearly inappropriate for producing teachers of the required age and standard.

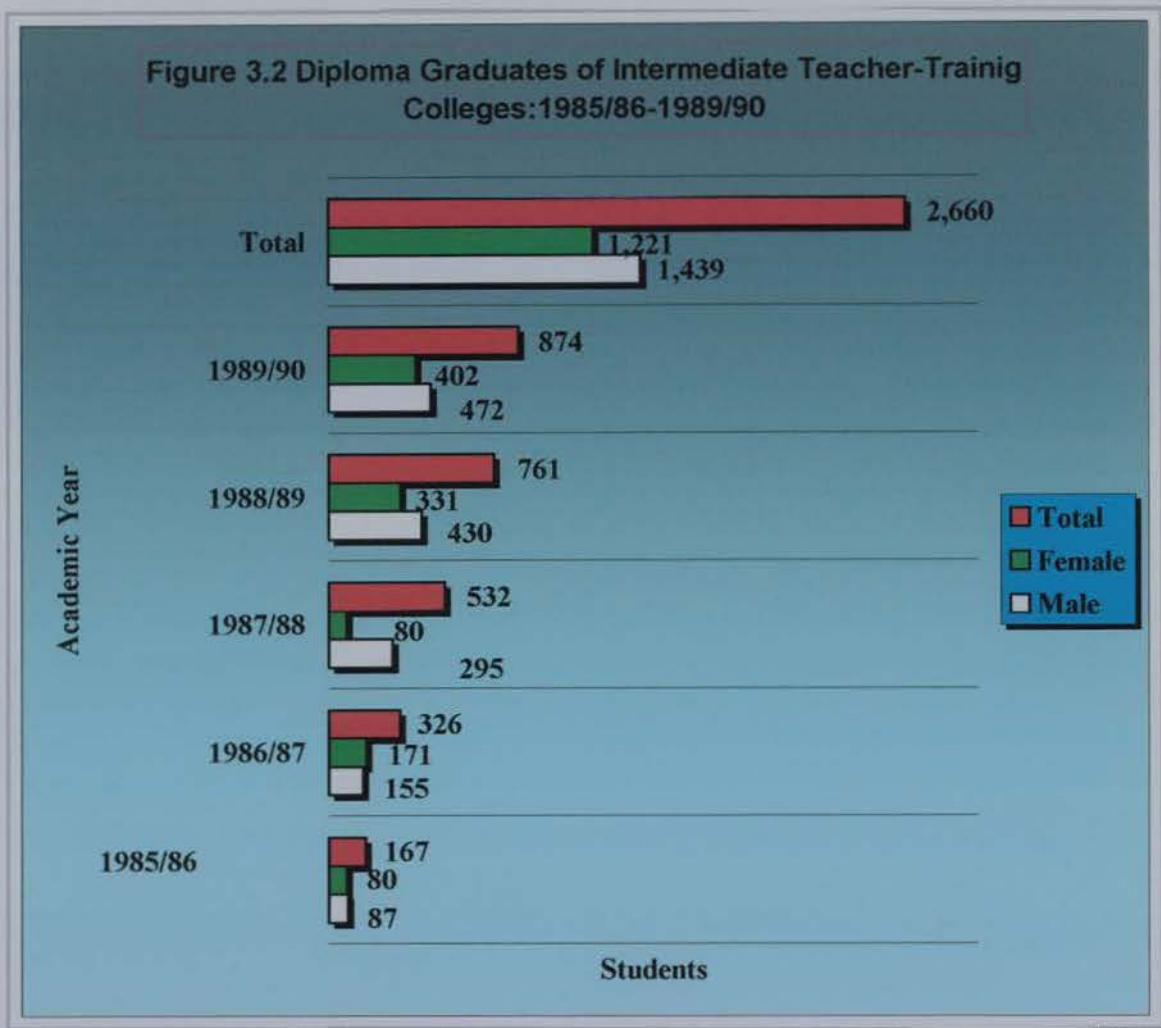
Consequently, the intermediate teacher-training college programme was allocated to the holders of the Secondary School Certificate. This was the first real step made towards establishing an effective educational organization for the training of specialized teachers in a variety of programmes needed for schools. The two-year course (Ministry of Education, 2000: 17), comprising two terms in each year, was designed to train teachers at two levels: one to teach the lower three grades of the primary stage, and the other to teach the upper three grades.

In 1984/85, the old system was discontinued so as to apply the new programmes. These were established in two colleges to begin with, and were in use in eight colleges by 1992 (ʿĪsān, 1995: 47, 49). The credit hour system was followed

with a specific curriculum for each term. It should be noted that these colleges applied the credit hour system before it was adopted by Sultan Qaboos University (which was opened in 1986). This new system gave students the flexibility to choose the time, tutor and courses. Nevertheless, it could not be fully implemented owing to the small number of tutors. Furthermore, the optional courses were limited, as was the number of students.

There is another point to be considered. These colleges were managed at the technical, administrative and financial level by the Teacher-Training and Counselling Department within the Ministry (Ġīsān, 1995: 67). One could argue that it would have been better to link these colleges with the office of the Minister or Under-Secretary. Failing that, a directorate should have been established with a head who was capable of working to a high standard of methodical administration, thus giving sufficient attention to every aspect of training in the colleges. Unfortunately, this issue was neglected at the beginning. I shall describe how officials dealt with this later (in the discussion of the 1990s).

The two-year teacher-training programme was applied for ten years in eight intermediate colleges in different regions of Oman. During that period, there were 10,346 graduates, of whom 4,795 were female (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000: 1). The first graduates were from the Muscat Intermediate College for Men and the Muscat Intermediate College for Women. The final group of graduates were again from these two colleges in 1995/96. Figure 3.2 and Table 3.3 show the annual number of graduates between 1985/86 and 1989/90.



Source: Ministry of Higher Education: Intermediate Teacher-Training College Graduates 1985/86–1995/96.

From the table and the figure, it can be seen that the number of female trainees was almost as high as that of the male trainees. Young women train in education for various reasons. First, employment is secured immediately following graduation. Second, they are usually employed in schools within their local area. Third, and most importantly, their preference in following a profession without the presence and participation of men is guaranteed. Chapter 4 will show how the number of female teachers increased according to Ministry of Education statistics. That is why the

Ministry began appointing female teachers to schools outside their local area. Another, recent, step has been to appoint only female teachers at the lower four grades of the primary stage.

Table 3.3 Diploma graduates of intermediate teacher-training colleges:
1985/86–1989/90

Academic year	No. of graduates		Total
	Male	Female	
1985/86	87	80	167
1986/87	155	171	326
1987/88	295	80	532
1988/89	430	331	761
1989/90	472	402	874
Total	1,439	1,221	2,660

Source: Ministry of Higher Education: Intermediate Teacher-Training College Graduates 1985/86–1995/96.

3.3 Technical Education

Technical education has been subjected to many arbitrary changes, which have had an unfortunate effect on its role in contributing to the development of Oman. Such changes are mainly the result of assigning this type of education to successive undefined authorities, whether it was the direct and comprehensive supervision and administration of the whole educational system or the mere supervision by a certain department. This section will discuss developments in this area and how the changes affected technical education.

In 1984, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour opened the first technical college in Muscat. The college admitted holders of the Secondary School Certificate to follow either the technical or commercial programme. Subjects included computing, accounts, management and marketing, office management, business administration, insurance, executive secretarial studies, laboratory sciences, electricity and electronics, town planning, and mechanical engineering (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000: 63).

It is well known that a high level of knowledge and modern technology are the main requirements for the development of any nation, for they are the basis of production, which in turn determines the national income and the standard of living. Furthermore, the strength and status of a nation in the world depend on the application of the appropriate knowledge and technology. The question here is: how can Oman apply the rapidly evolving technology of the West? Is there a suitable programme for keeping up to date with modern technology and applying it as required at each stage of development (Mursī, 1985: 145)?

Unfortunately, the current situation in Oman runs contrary to that approach, as witnessed by the history and progress of technical education in the country. The random application of hastily conceived vocational programmes, the changes in the administrative organizations and those in charge of them are clear examples of the lack of carefully considered, far-sighted objective planning in technical education. This is a serious situation, for a high standard of technical education is essential to produce suitably qualified technical personnel who can contribute to their country's progress by applying the latest developments in modern technology.

Clearly, a long-term and comprehensive plan needs to be devised with the co-operation of all the relevant institutions in the public and private sectors. Such a plan should be based on the following:

1. A survey of the national, economic and social situation.
2. A survey of the standard of education.
3. An assessment of the needs of the local labour market for a trained labour force.
4. A definition of the changes to be made to the institutions of higher education.
5. A definition of the objectives of the plan and the preparation of its executive programmes.

(al-Dabāgh, 1988: 65)

In addition, a survey of the expatriate labour force should be carried out, with particular reference to its proportion of the total labour force, the areas of speciality, the level of need in each area, and the possibility of reducing that proportion by Omanization, that is, by recruiting a suitably qualified and trained labour force of Omanis. Specialists in employment are fully aware of the situation, as confirmed in the following statement by the Ministry of the Civil Service:

Linking policies of education and training to the country's public and private sector needs for a labour force is the best approach to limit wastage of human and physical resources, which should be rationalised as much as possible. Absence of a comprehensive plan was a reason behind the shortage of technical and vocational programmes of study and this caused a surplus in the numbers of students who enrolled in the humanities and also increased the number of Secondary School Certificate holders. (Ministry of the Civil Service, 1998: 12)

The strange paradox here is that although government officials have been aware of the problem as described in the above quotation, yet no changes have been made to current policies. Making statements is not sufficient to rectify problems in

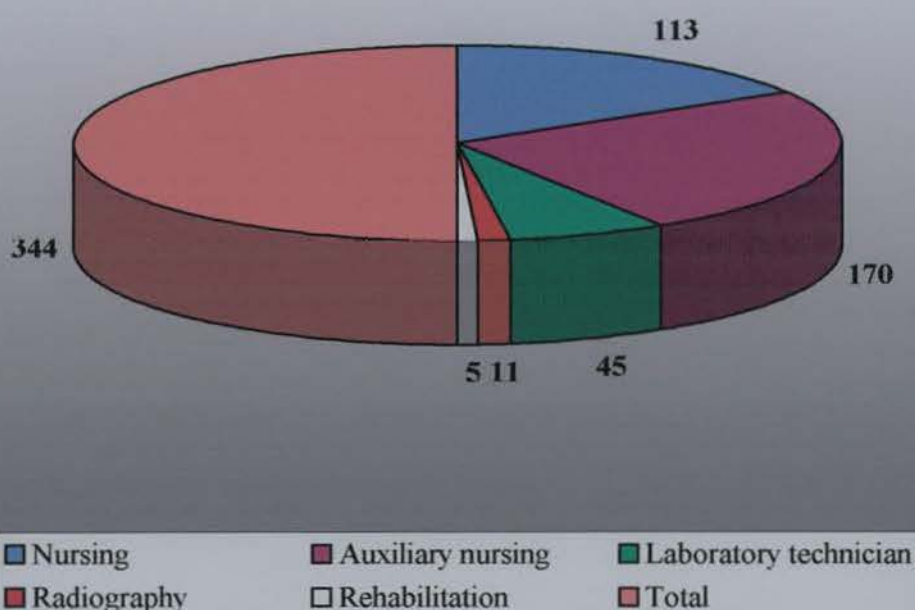
the educational system. Such statements should be put into practice with the resources available and according to the country's actual needs.

3.4 Health Science Education

In addition to the College of Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University, which opened in the same year as the University (1986), the Institute of Health Sciences was established in 1982. Students could choose from a range of courses, including nursing and paramedical studies. Of the first intake of students, 54 graduated in 1985. Up to 1990, there were 344 graduates in five areas: nursing, auxiliary nursing, laboratory technician, radiography, and rehabilitation (Ministry of Health, 1998: 3–9).

It should be noted that this aspect of education did not receive sufficient consideration during that period (1981-1990). The reason could be that the government was giving more support to basic health services, which were being established or expanded in areas all over the country where they had not existed before 1970. Nevertheless, this does not excuse those officials in charge of health science education for failing to develop and expand such an important field, bearing in mind that most of its employees are non-Omanis. Meanwhile, Omani nationals are waiting to play their part in serving their country and improving its standard of living by following a wide range of vocations.

Figure 3.3 Ministry of Health medical programmes: graduates 1982/1990



Note: Before 1982, there graduated 83 students from the nursing school in al-Rahma Hospital.

Source: Ministry of Health, Education & Training Dept, 1997/98.

According to Figure 3.3 and Table 3.4, there was an emphasis on the nursing programmes with 344 male and female nurses graduating up to 1990. However, this number constituted only 10 per cent of the total number (3,512) of nursing staff in the hospitals and health centres of Oman. Furthermore, the total number of graduates (427) constituted only 5.5 per cent of the total number (7,740) of these categories of hospital staff in 1990 (Ministry of National Economy, 1999: 478). There is a marked difference between the two percentages, which is why the programmes should be revised to reduce the gap.

Table 3.4 Ministry of Health medical programmes:

Graduates 1982–1990

Programme	No. of graduates
Nursing	113
Auxiliary Nursing	170
Laboratory technician	45
Radiography	11
Rehabilitation	5
Total	344

Source: Ministry of Health, Education & Training Department, 1998.

3.5 Religious Education

Religious education has also witnessed changes similar to those made to technical education. It has been subject to short-term plans and the personal policies of officials, which are always changeable.

Let us, for example, look at the seven intermediate Islamic institutes, which existed in some of the mosques of Oman between the 1980s and the mid-1990s, together with the state schools (al-Manthri, 1992: 111). The Islamic institutes were closed down. Then the Secondary Islamic Institute in Muscat, which trained students in both Arabic and Islamic Education, was also closed down and replaced with the College of Shari‘ah and Law.

Other institutions, such as the Sultan Qaboos Institute for Islamic Studies, which trained students for employment in this field, were gradually neglected, especially after the establishment of the College of Shari‘ah and Law. Such changes, in addition to the administration of this type of education by different government organizations, had an adverse effect, for there was no methodical planning and

implementation of its programmes. During the previous and current stages, religious education has been administered by the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs, and Justice. Other bodies such as Sultan Qaboos University and the Royal Diwan have also been involved.

3.5.1 Institute of Shari'ah and Counselling

This Institute was established in 1986 with the aim of training judges, mosque imams and other technical staff to work in the law courts. It is affiliated to the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs (Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs, 2002). The Institute admits secondary school leavers to a four-year course comprising 150 credit hours over 8 terms. The programme consists of juristic studies (39 per cent), Islamic culture (19 per cent), Arabic (17 per cent), and the remaining 25 per cent includes Qur'anic and Hadith studies, Islamic doctrine and missionary (da'wa) work (Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs, 1999a).

The aims and programmes of the Institute were urgently needed in the early years, for it was important to train staff in certain areas of law and Shari'ah, especially since the regulations for the new courts had not been fully formulated. The graduates of the Institute made a positive contribution to the application of legislation, for they solved many personal status cases in the law courts around the country.

3.6 Institute of Banking

As a result of developments in the role of banking in the Omani economy and the need for a staff of qualified nationals, Royal Decree no. 64/83 was issued to establish the Institute of Banking, which received its first intake of students in September 1983.

The Institute is located in Muscat, and trains Omanis in banking and finance, as well as upgrading the vocational and technical skills of staff already employed in these fields. Students can enrol for full- or part-time courses. A diploma is awarded in foreign commercial finance, banking, accounts, programming, credit and auditing.

Admission to the Institute is based on its capacity and the needs of the local banks. Full-time students are required to have the Secondary School Certificate or its equivalent, whereas part-time students are also required to have one year's experience in banking and finance, or three years' experience without the Secondary School Certificate. All students sit a placement test in English, mathematics and general knowledge. The programmes comprise four terms over two years (Institute of Banking, 1997).

The Institute has played an important role in Omanizing most of the posts in this sector of employment in the country, to the extent that nowadays it is very rare to see expatriates working in this field. It has therefore been a great achievement in a short time.

3.7 Leadership and Staff College

The Leadership and Staff College is a specialist institution and is part of the Royal Forces of Oman. It was established in 1987 to train officers chosen from all units of the Royal Forces and the Royal Security Forces, as well as similar units from other countries, with the aim of enabling them to qualify for leadership positions.

3.7.1 Objectives of the College and its Courses

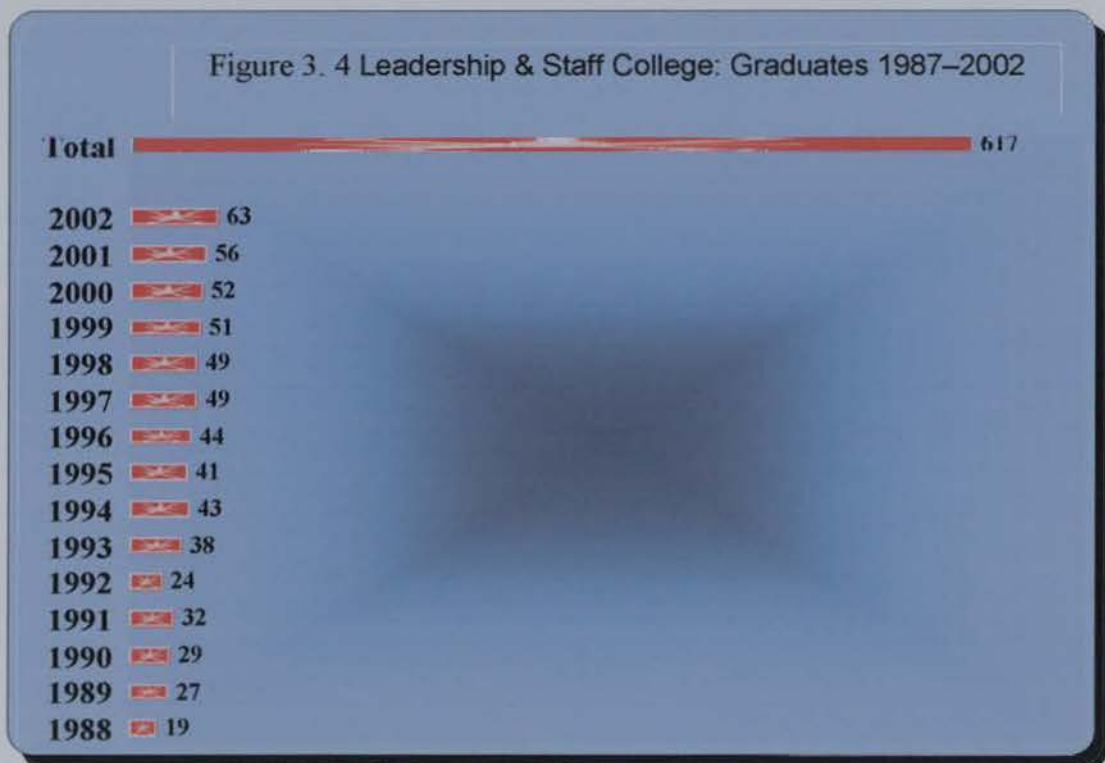
- Providing officers with a wide knowledge of military sciences.
- Training officers to a level that will enable them to hold positions as staff officers and unit leaders.

- Conducting research to improve the officers' capabilities in military sciences.

The college runs training courses for a period of 44 weeks divided into 4 terms for each course. Officers receive education in military communication, mobilization training, political geography and strategies, international conflict, and science and technology. On completion, students are awarded a BSc degree in military sciences provided that they pass in all subjects. The Ministry of Higher Education accredits the certificate issued as a vocational qualification.

3.7.2 Graduation

From its establishment in 1987 until 2002, fifteen batches of officers, totalling 617, have graduated from the College. The number of graduates has increased from 19 in 1988 to 63 in 2002, as shown in Figure 3.4.



Source: The Leadership and Staff College, Muscat, 2002.

It should be stated that the establishment of a specialized college in military and strategic sciences is an important issue in many countries where staff are trained in modern military sciences. Sultan Qaboos highlighted this point in his speech at the inauguration of the Leadership and Staff College:

Nowadays, the military leader is not an officer who merely issues orders, but rather he is required to be educated and well qualified in the military arts and sciences. For this reason many states, especially those with long experience in the military field, have given attention to training to the required level of qualification those members of the military staff who will be assigned leadership missions. (Leadership and Staff College, 1999)

Before the establishment of this college and others for military and security training – which will be discussed in Chapter 4 – Oman used to send many officers and other members of the military on courses in military sciences to other countries such as the United Kingdom, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

To obtain a degree in military sciences from the Leadership and Staff College, an officer has to spend one year, as from September to July. Clearly, this is a short time in which to obtain a degree, and so perhaps the Ministry of Higher Education took into consideration the previous period of service when classifying this course as a vocational rather than an academic BSc.

3.8 Scholarships

Since 1970 the government has taken every possible step to fulfil the comprehensive development of every aspect of modern life, particularly education. One area of education that has been accorded special attention is scholarships. Therefore, two Royal Decrees, nos. 7/1973 and 22/1977, were issued to examine and organize the whole procedure of scholarships and fellowships.

During the 1980s, interest in this issue was intensified as more Omanis were awarded scholarships to study abroad, owing to the increase in state secondary school leavers and the inadequate number of institutions of higher education at home. In addition, there was a decisive need for qualified staff who could contribute to the country's development. A third Royal Decree, no. 13/1985, was issued, regulating undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships and fellowships for both students and staff. The Minister of Education and Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, in his speech to the *Shura* Council in 1992, stated the aims of the scholarships:

1. Developing human resources that could be used for the country's development.
2. Expanding scientific research, which would play an important role in the advancement of knowledge and its exploitation for comprehensive development.

(al-Manthri, 1992: 24).

The first aim was fulfilled within the available resources. The Minister pointed out that 2,679 students had graduated between 1981 and 1990. However, this number is too small when compared with the length of time.

A case study produced an incorrect estimate of 19,534 graduates for the same period. (ʿAbdīn, 1992: 34) Another study by the Ministry of Higher Education produced the same result (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000: 37). Clearly this figure is too high. Both researchers made the same error in their calculations, as shown in the table of the first study: they added up the accumulated totals for each year, that is, the number of new awards plus the number of current scholarships. This was confirmed by the Minister's statement. According to him, there had been 806 scholarship students since the opening of Sultan Qaboos University in 1986, out of

whom 354 had been awarded government scholarships, and the remainder had been sponsored by other bodies or were privately supported. (al- Manthri, 1992: 25)

If the results of the two case studies were correct, it would mean that 10,222 students would have been awarded scholarships between 1986 and 1990. This would have been more than twelve times the true figure as stated by the Minister of Education.

Table 3.5 shows that the number of scholarship students was increasing systematically, reaching a peak of 2,681 in 1985/86. Then the number gradually fell to 704 in 1990/91. This was due to the opening of Sultan Qaboos University, after which scholarships were restricted to areas of study that were not available at the University. The number of new applicants for awards also fell from 655 in 1985 to 55 in 1990 (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999a: 17, 21).

It could be concluded from the table that the range of subjects was broad and balanced to a certain extent so that it met the requirements of the previous period. There was not a wide disparity between the numbers of scholarships awarded for theoretical and applied studies as was shown in the discussion above of Sultan Qaboos University.

According to the official statistics of students studying overseas, the number of male students has always been higher than that of female students. The proportion of female students rose slightly from 17.7 per cent in 1986/87 to only 20.7 per cent in 1990/91 (ʿĀbdīn, 1992: 34). This reflects the conservative nature of Omani society, for most parents do not accept the idea of their daughters studying abroad. In addition, there was a tendency to educate men during the early years, for the country was in urgent need of specialized staff in certain areas.

Besides the Scholarship General Directorate, there is a special committee for the awarding of scholarships. It comprises representatives of the Ministries of Education, the Civil Service, Finance and Economics, and the Ministry of Higher Education after its establishment in 1994. There are also members from Sultan Qaboos University and other relevant bodies. The committee is responsible for selecting students according to the terms and conditions laid down, which candidates are required to meet, so as to create a balance between the awarding of scholarships and the needs of the labour market for graduates, thus investing all available financial resources without any wastage (al-Manthri, 1992: 24–25).

The committee also sets out the terms and conditions for granting scholarships to suitable candidates, which are changed from time to time according to current circumstances. Influential factors include the financial resources available and the overall percentage of pupils who achieve the Secondary School Certificate, for the minimum average increases every year. Pupils who obtain higher percentages usually receive scholarships, for the number is relatively low, that is, a maximum of 80 awards, out of which 20 are earmarked for Civil Service staff. Therefore, only the outstanding candidates are granted scholarships (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000: 14).

This system of awarding scholarships to such a small number of students with a very high pass mark has created some problems that could result in the wastage of the limited financial resources allocated to this sector. One example is that some students do not finish their courses of study within the designated period, and therefore their places are occupied for a longer period while the committee allows them to continue until they have completed their studies. This policy is applied to

avoid wastage of money if the students are asked to end their studies before completion of the course.

There is another problem at graduate level. The government institutions are not obliged to recruit a certain number of scholarship graduates, for they can assert that there are no vacant posts at suitable grades. The irony here is that the institutions had been consulted about their needs, according to which the students were awarded scholarships and sent abroad to follow courses of study in specializations needed by those same institutions.

Such excuses made by some ministries and government institutions are sometimes justified, even if hard to accept. This is because other higher financial and administrative authorities do not provide these institutions with posts at suitable grades for appointing new graduates. On the other hand, the vacant posts at suitable grades are filled before the students have completed their courses of study, and thus officials at the intermediate administrative level guarantee the continuity of their employment without the danger of losing their position. This reality continues to exist while the older directors holding lower or older qualifications think along these lines. In addition, there is the problem of manipulation by those in authority in the recruitment department, who prefer to fill vacancies with their relatives and friends, even if the latter are not qualified for such posts.

Some ministries make immediate use of the posts allocated to certain grades, for they fill them as soon as they become vacant so that they can secure other grades for graduates upon completing their studies since suitable posts may not be available at that time.

Whatever the reasons, it should be noted that there is little co-ordination among government bodies regarding scholarships and the recruitment of Omani graduates according to their area of study. There should be a strict monitoring of the recruitment to ministries. At present, there is a central recruitment programme supervised by the Ministry of the Civil Service. This programme could be an appropriate solution if it were applied objectively and was based on sound principles. Recruitment has become an issue of great concern to decision-makers, and so it is examined in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Table 3.5 Scholarships awarded in 1980/81, 1985/86 & 1990/91

Year	Area of study										Total
	Medicine	Pharmacy	Engineer- ing	Science	Agri- culture	Arts	Law	Business	Politics & Economics	Others	
1980/81	62	3	161	95	15	99	24	200	73	207	939
1985/86	137	3	563	191	107	527	396	348	97	312	2,681
1990/91	116	13	163	31	24	21	21	161	29	125	704

Source: Ministry of Education, 1992.

3.9 Part-time Education

Owing to their desire to pursue their graduate studies, some students have followed part-time education courses in other countries. Another reason is the limited capacity of institutions of higher education in Oman. The courses are provided by institutions such as the Arab University of Beirut, Cairo University, Alexandria University and Ain Shams University. Most of the students are registered with the Arab University of Beirut. When it was impossible for Omani students to sit examinations in the Lebanon from 1982 owing to the war, the Omani Ministry of Education arranged for the examinations to be held in Muscat. Then the Ministry signed an agreement with the Arab University of Beirut to regulate part-time studies. (al- Manthri, 2000: 6) Between 1982/83 and 1990/91 there were 887 graduates in a range of subjects, with the majority in the arts, business and law (al-Manthri, 1992: 27).

Education is an essential human principle which is supported by all religions and international law, and emphasized at conferences on education. According to Prophet Muhammad, we should “seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave”. The first paragraph of Article 26 of the International Convention on Human Rights states that “each person has the right to an education”. In addition, the International Conference on Adult Education, which was held in Hamburg in 1997, made an appeal to the International Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in 1988, to encourage institutions of higher education to become lifelong educational centres (UNESCO, 1998a: 20).

These initiatives are considered the right approach for any civilized nation that believes in education as the concrete basis for development and change. Therefore, this type of education should be encouraged by all the authorities, who

should not allow legislation to restrict or neglect it in any way. Examples of restrictions are setting an age limit for applicants to courses of study or not allowing employees to continue their studies on a part-time basis. All employees should have the right to continue their studies, provided that it will not affect the performance of their work, and will not need financial support from the employers.

At present, some public authorities are trying to prevent this type of education by prohibiting their employees from registering as part-time students unless they sign an agreement abandoning their right to due promotion on completion of their studies. These bodies assert that the funds are not available. Such an assertion does not mean that employees should be prevented from continuing their education if they so wish, especially if it is clear that it will bring positive results for both the employees and their work performance. It should be mentioned that in 1990, the graduated employees in public institution numbered 2,763 or 6.3 per cent of the total employees in this sector according to the Ministry of the Civil Service statistics (Ministry of the Civil Service, 2000: 8).

3.10 Postgraduate Studies

Since the government wished to expedite the creation of qualified staff to teach at the newly established institutions of higher education in Oman, a number of staff were granted scholarships to study for Master's and PhD degrees abroad, including the Arab world, Europe, the United States and Canada. The previous Minister of Education stated:

During the planning stage of establishing Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Education realized the importance of having qualified Omani staff to teach at the University. Therefore, it was necessary to nominate a number of university graduates to obtain higher certificates, that is, Master and Doctorate. (al-Manthri, 1992: 25)

It could be concluded, therefore, that the scholarships for further studies abroad began immediately after the commencement of the Sultan Qaboos University project in the early 1980s. As the Minister pointed out, the Department of Higher Studies was established for that reason.

Consequently, a number of qualified and distinguished officials were sent to pursue higher studies abroad. These people constituted the nucleus of the academic staff of the University. In 1997, Sultan Qaboos appointed some of them for leading positions in, for example, the Ministries of Oil and Gas; Agriculture; the Environment and Regional Municipalities; Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training; and Education.

A candidate from a public institution is usually granted a scholarship with the agreement of the sponsoring Ministry and the Ministry of the Civil Service. If the candidate is employed in the University, the agreement of the University Council is sufficient to continue with the regular procedure of nominating staff.

Between 1982 and 1991, there were 252 students in receipt of a scholarship, of whom 111 were from the University and 141 from other ministries. In 1992, there were 125 graduates with a Master's degree and 28 with a Ph.D. degree. (al- Manthri, 1992: 26) Although the number is small, it has formed a good basis for higher education, for more students have been gradually sent to study abroad. It will also be seen that another step was taken in initiating many higher education courses inside the country.

3.11 Higher Education Agreements between Oman and Other Countries

During the 1980s Oman signed a number of agreements with other countries regarding higher education. These included China (15 August 1981), Qatar (24 October 1981), Pakistan (20 September 1984), Morocco (22 January 1985), Tunisia (16 November 1985), and Italy (28 April 1988). Other executive programmes were signed with Egypt (3 July 1986), the United Arab Emirates (24 February 1987), Ontario, Canada (24 May 1988), Kuwait (17 February 1990) and Qatar (18 September 1990) (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999b).

These agreements aimed at promoting co-operation between the institutions of higher education in those countries and educational institutions in Oman, including the exchange of visits by officials and experts, and the exchange of teaching staff and fellowships. Oman benefited by providing Omanis with fellowships to study at the institutions of higher education in the other countries. In addition, there was the secondment of qualified staff and expertise from the universities of those countries to work in Oman. Oman's contribution was small except for the programmes signed with the Gulf Co-operation Council states. This had a negative effect on the agreements, for they were not fulfilled according to the plans and wishes of the Omani government. The other countries wanted similar facilities to be provided by the agreements, such as sending their nationals to study in Oman on a fellowship basis. However, officials in Oman were reluctant to admit students, for, according to them, there were no places available.

3.12 Further Comments

It is evident that the 1980s witnessed the beginning of organized higher education in Oman. However, its development requires more time, money, effort and sensible, balanced planning to achieve its objectives.

Table 3.6 Nos. of higher education graduates 1980/81–1989/90

Institution	80/81	81/82	82/83	83/84	84/85	85/86	86/87	87/88	88/89	89/90
Sultan Qaboos University	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	283
Teacher-training institute	91	155	304	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Intermediate teacher-training colleges	—	—	—	—	—	167	326	532	761	874
Health sciences institutes	—	—	—	52	54	45	45	62	38	48
Technical industrial college	—	—	—	—	65	174	174	159	198	226
Scholarships	109	125	183	195	186	249	246	429	544	413
Total	200	280	487	247	305	635	791	1,182	1,541	1,844

In comparison with other countries which preceded Oman in this field, it should be acknowledged that the targets reached within a short period are worthy of admiration and respect. Although the number of graduates is increasing annually (see Table 3.6)-it had increased twenty fold during the 1980s- the total was not sufficient

to meet the needs of the public and private sector institutions for qualified employees.

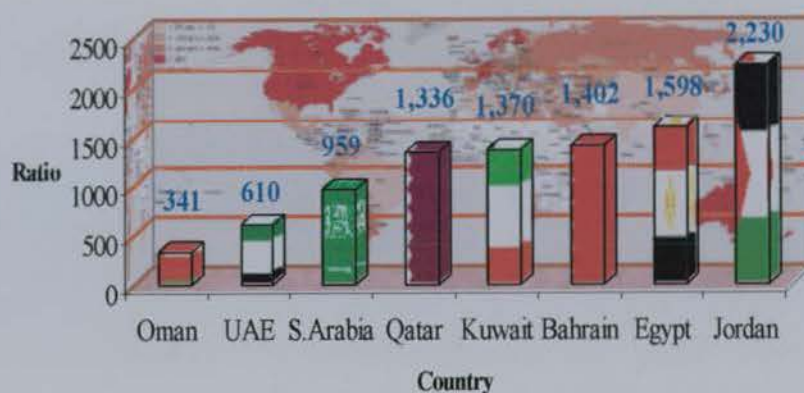
Table 3.7 Distribution of students in higher education 1991/92

Type of higher education	Percentage
Education & teacher-training	59.0
Engineering & industrial vocations	12.5
Medicine, medical studies & general health	11.1
Humanities, religious studies, business, information, documentation & home economics	7.7
Science, mathematics & computing	5.2
Agriculture	3.1
Other programmes	11.4

A careful examination of Table 3.7 shows that 59 per cent of higher education students are in education and teacher-training. The reason for this high proportion is the implementation of the government's policy to Omanize the teaching profession.

Figure 3.5 and Table 3.8 show that in its proportion of higher education students per 100,000 of population, Oman is placed at the bottom of the scale after the Gulf Co-operation Council states, Egypt and Jordan, where the number of students is 341 students. It also comes after the United Arab Emirates, where the difference is 269 fewer students, and Jordan, the top country in the figure, where the difference is 1,889 fewer students.

Figure 3.5 Proportion of higher education students per 100,000 population: 1990



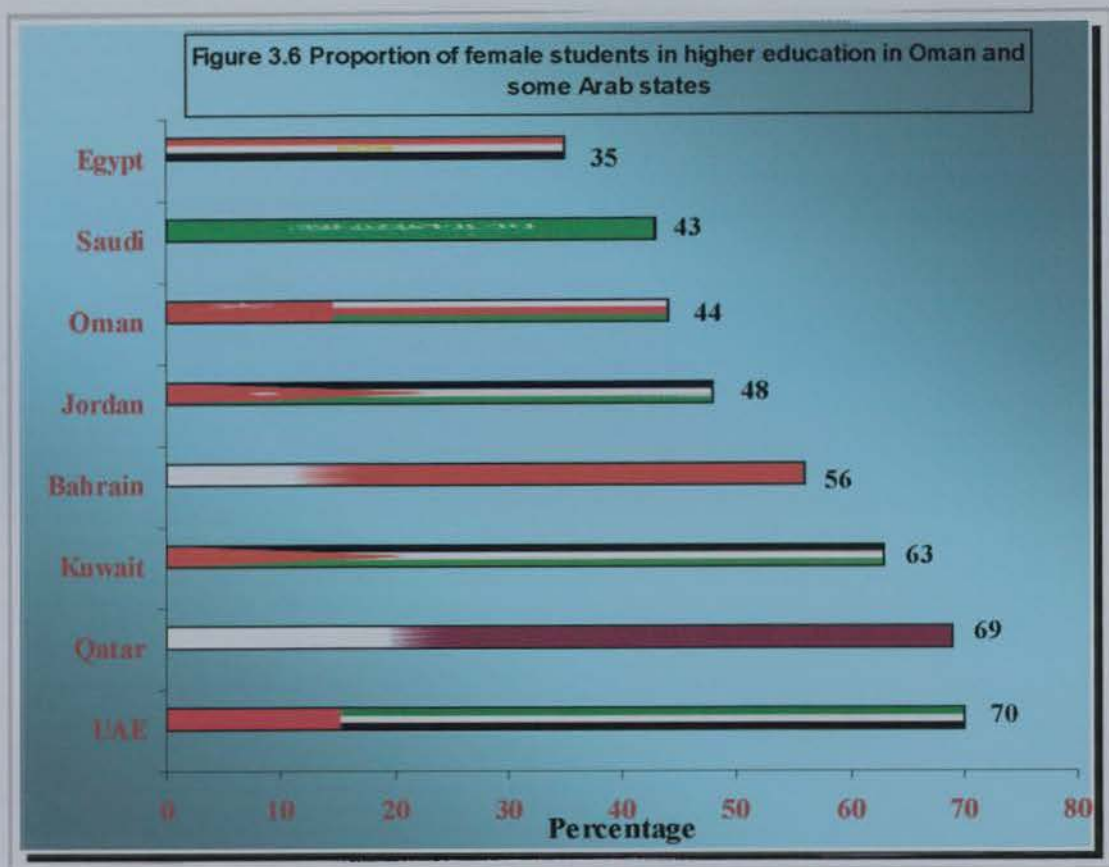
Source: UNESCO, 1998.

Table 3.8 Proportion of higher education students per 100,000 population: 1990

Country	Oman	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Bahrain	Kuwait	Egypt	Jordan
Ratio	341	959	610	1,336	1,402	1,370	1,598	2,230

Source: UNESCO, 1998.

Figure 3.6 and Table 3.9 show that the proportion of female students in higher education in Oman is well balanced at 44 per cent. However, the proportion is very high in the United Arab Emirates (70 per cent) and Qatar (69 per cent).



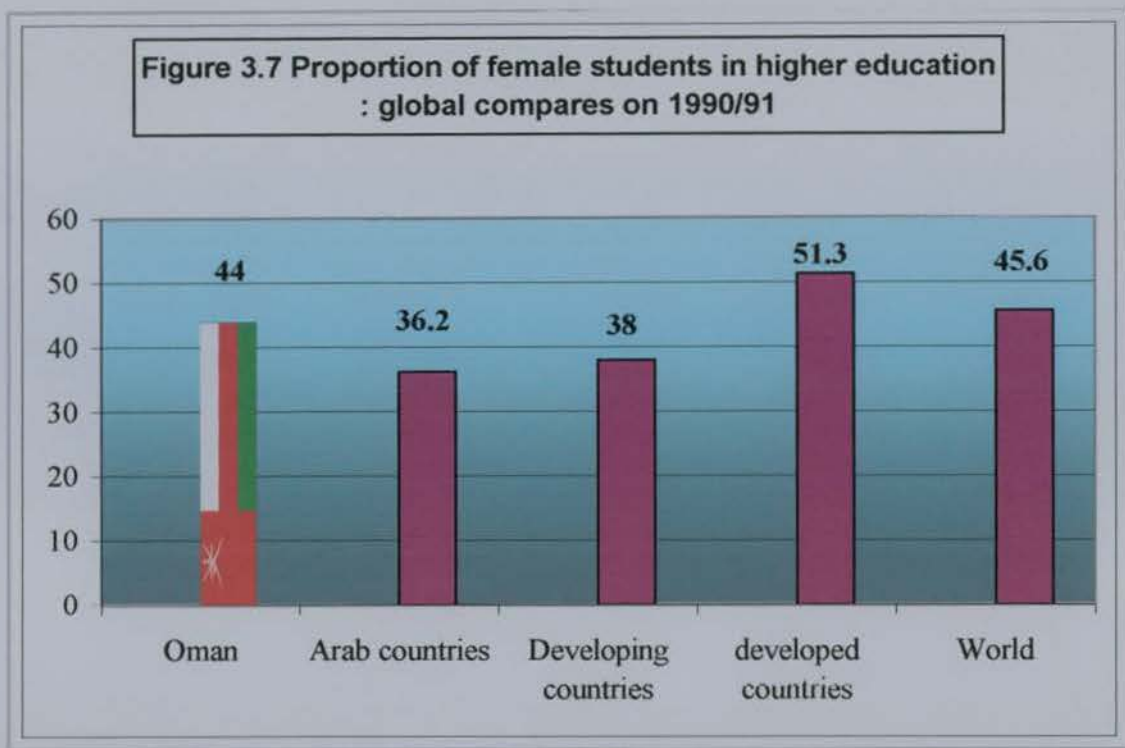
Source: UNESCO, 1998.

Table 3.9 Proportion of female students in higher education

Country	Oman	Saudi Arabia	UAE	Qatar	Bahrain	Kuwait	Egypt	Jordan
%age	44	43	70	69	56	63	35	48

Source: UNESCO, 1998.

It should also be noted that the percentage of female students in higher education in Oman is proportionate to the world percentage of 45.6, as shown in Figure 3.7 and Table 3.10.



Source: UNESCO, 1998.

Table 3.10 Proportion of female students in higher education:
Global comparison 1990/91

Country	Oman	Arab countries	Developing countries	Developed countries	World
%age	44	36.2	38	51.3	45.6

Source: UNESCO, 1998.

During the 1980s, higher education in Oman faced a number of challenges, of which the following are some examples:

1. There was a marked increase in the number of candidates as a natural result of the increase in population and the improvement in the national economy and standard of living. However, owing to short-term planning, the institutions of

higher education could not meet the demand for their courses. Their capacity to admit more students was still inadequate ten years after their establishment. Such a phenomenon requires officials to reconsider their future planning methods in this important field. They should take into account all future variables, together with a realistic assessment of every aspect of the current situation. The aim is to raise the education sector to the level where it can meet the demands of society, taking into consideration that there should be more concentration on the development of human resources, especially bearing in mind the country's current dependence on limited natural resources for its income.

2. There was a weakness in the links between the three stages of state education and the courses in higher education available during that decade (1981-1990). This was evident in the difficulty experienced by secondary school leavers in adapting to the higher education courses to which they were admitted, especially those in the applied sciences such as medicine, engineering and the physical sciences, or those which required proficiency in English, for most of these courses are taught in English. The Ministry of Education's application of a Foundation Education Programme in the schools at the end of the 1990s might be the solution to this problem. However, no definite assessment can be made until the first intake of students under this system have graduated.
3. Although state and higher education are freely available to everyone in Oman – despite some inequality in the provision of opportunities for higher education – many poor families have preferred to seek employment for their sons so as to ensure a secure source of income. In addition, many of these school leavers

could not achieve sufficiently high marks in their examination results to be admitted to institutions of higher education. This situation could be attributed to the families' substandard living conditions. To help bridge the gap, the government was keen to support such families with a social security programme. It offered a monthly grant to university students from these backgrounds, as well as giving financial aid to students at other institutions of higher education for purchasing necessities such as stationery.

Chapter 4 in this thesis describes how the government allocated a number of fellowships and scholarships to candidates of poor families and those living in remote areas. The aim was to encourage them to pursue their studies and help them to reduce the social and financial gap between them and the better-off by "getting jobs of better income. Their education is likely to improve their attitudes and practices in the field of their general health and their impact on their families with regard to limiting the family members" (Reimers, 1999).

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter concludes with the following comments and recommendations regarding higher education in Oman during the 1980s:

1. It should be emphasized that more financial support is needed for better investment in higher education to enable its institutions to ensure an adequate capacity for meeting the demands of a growing population seeking higher qualifications. The provision and updating of information technology and other educational equipment, access to the latest publications and other up-to-date information are just some examples where financial support needs to be guaranteed.

2. The image of the twenty-first-century university is different from that of earlier times. It is more closely linked to its society, with which it shares its own ambitions. Therefore, the role of the university and other institutions of higher education should be better integrated so as to serve society. This could be achieved by:
 - (a) providing a qualified labour force for all areas of development;
 - (b) participating in research efforts to solve many of the problems in society by seeking and promoting the most suitable methods of managing human and natural resources, as well as improving their potential; and
 - (c) publishing the results of research for the mutual benefit of university researchers in all areas. Therefore, it is necessary to establish appropriate scientific periodicals for this purpose.
3. It was noted earlier that the majority of the University students enrol in the faculties of education and the arts. Officials should reconsider this situation, for it is becoming a burden on the government as a result of a large number of these graduates not being absorbed into the labour market. This seems to be a problem encountered by most Arab universities.
4. Teacher-training programmes were the most subject to change during the early stages, until they were upgraded to university courses during the first half of the 1990s. Such continual changes, in addition to the government's emphasis on producing qualified Omani graduates, were implemented in imitation of other countries that were carrying out development programmes at the foundation stage. A large number of teaching staff had to be provided to satisfy such aims,

which unfortunately led to an emphasis on quantity instead of quality. It was stated by a scholar in this field:

The main concern of Gulf Countries was to produce the maximum number of national teachers from universities and teacher training institutes to take over the development process in their countries. Because of the acceleration in the developmental process, it was not possible to focus on the quality of the graduates, especially those of teacher training colleges, which affected the students negatively. (Salām, 1996: 121)

Therefore, officials adopted a mandatory approach to achieve a relative balance between national and expatriate teachers in the state schools, so as to limit the effects of the expatriate culture, whatever its source, on the rising generations.

5. Vocational training and education, as a main branch of state and higher education in Oman, should be reconsidered. This is an important step, for it is clear that the University Colleges, with their limited capacity, cannot absorb all the state school leavers. It should be borne in mind that not all students have the ambition to complete their university studies, and, in addition, suitable vocational programmes need to be created for more Omanis to qualify as technicians.

This entails giving attention to higher education and its preceding stage. It should be noted that the experience of the Ministry of Education in opening vocational schools in commerce, industry and agriculture in the 1980s would have provided a sound basis for this type of education had it been continued. Vocational and technical education is still lacking a clear structure and so it has not yet reached the stage where it can be as effective in producing suitably qualified personnel as other types of education in Oman.

6. Religious education is still in need of carefully considered planning to reflect and promote the unity and harmony of all sectors of society and their doctrines. This cannot be achieved without the mutual respect and appreciation of the various Islamic sects, which could lead to a common understanding. Courses of study and projects at school and university level could be revised to deal with this important issue more appropriately so as to produce better results and contribute to developing the spiritual aspect of society, as well as its culture and knowledge.

Sultan Qaboos highlighted the issue in many speeches. In 1994 he declared: "Any form of extremism, fanaticism or factionalism, whatever its motives might be, is rejected by our principles and people" (Ministry of Information, 1995: 395). During his meeting with the University students in 2000, he stressed the idea of independence of thought: "You should be very careful and you have not to follow others' ideas, whether religious or anything else. You should be aware that everyone has the right to think and consider matters logically" (Ministry of Information, 2000: 112).

7. Although the annual number of scholarships awarded to university students to study abroad is already limited, it does not seem necessary to increase it, especially to young people in the age range of 18 to 22. It is believed that such students could be unduly influenced by the lifestyles of other countries, which would make it difficult for them to readapt to their conservative society on their return home. This would mean a waste of time and effort on the part of the students and a waste of the country's human and financial resources.

This phenomenon was apparent during earlier years. However, it became worse during the 1990s when a number of Omani students went abroad to study because there were no places available at their local institutions of higher education. The authorities had to prevent certain students from completing their courses or sometimes not offer them employment because they were registered with unrecognized universities and colleges. Some of them were offered places in the local institutions of higher education.

Therefore, the ideal solution is to increase the number of local institutions of higher education, bearing in mind the high and growing demand for this level of education by most sectors of society, who consider it to be the only means to improve individual incomes and standards of living.

8. There should be a competent authority for the institutions of higher education in Oman so as to unite the efforts from all quarters such that all policies of this vital sector are implemented properly without duplication or conflict. It would also achieve the long-term stability of such institutions, which continue to be managed haphazardly with the resulting waste of time and human potential. It is hoped that the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education in 1994 and the Higher Education Council in 1998 will realize such goals, provided that these bodies implement the policies objectively and take the common good into consideration.
9. One of the main advantages of the advancement of higher education in Oman during the 1980s was its provision in the regions outside the capital area of Muscat. The first step was to establish intermediate teacher-training colleges in the main cities such as Sohar, Rustaq, Ibri, Nizwa, Sur and Salalah. The teacher-

training colleges were established in the same way. The government plans to extend higher education, including teacher-training, health, business and technical education, to most of the regions. This is a vital step and it is hoped that it will achieve social equality and balance between the urban and rural areas, something that has been achieved in many countries around the world.

Chapter Four

In Search of Stability

Introduction

The 1980s could be considered the period of establishing and developing higher education, for they witnessed the opening of Sultan Qaboos University, technical industrial college, the Institute of Health Sciences, the Institute of Banking and intermediate teacher-training colleges. On the other hand, the 1990s could be considered the early stage of stabilization, clearly evidenced by the introduction of a range of educational programmes; the formation of relevant ministries, councils and institutions; the implementation of a succession of appropriate government decisions, and the appointment of specialized staff. These steps were to create the formula for the future of this sector and clarify its identity, which so far had not yet been fully specified.

The following are a few examples of instability in higher education in Oman:

- The establishment of the Higher Committee of Labour and Vocational Training and the Vocational Training Authority, followed by their abolition within a short period.
- Changing the University structure twice within less than a year.
- Replacement of the University senior staff three times within less than five years.
- The introduction of different programmes in the technical industrial colleges within a short period.

The above examples show that the government had no clear vision of the long-term objectives of higher education. There were a few ambitious projects supported by the government during this period. For example, the government encouraged the private sector to open colleges in various regions of the Sultanate. Furthermore, the government granted licences to investors in education to open private universities. It is hoped that this project will come into effect during the early years of the new millennium.

This chapter discusses the above issues in detail by evaluating the practices that were followed during this period. It begins with the latest aspects and then examines developments in the institutions of higher education during previous eras.

4.1 Council for Higher Education

Royal Decree no. 65/98 was issued to form the Council for Higher Education headed by the Minister of the Royal Court as Chairman, and the Minister of Higher Education as Deputy Chairman. The members of the Council include the Ministers of the National Economy, Education, Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, as well as the Chancellor of Sultan Qaboos University, the Under-Secretary of the Council for Higher Education and seven other members representing scholars, distinguished individuals and the private sector representatives (Royal Decree 65/98).

The Council was established for the following reasons:

- Higher education was supervised by a number of different institutions.
- Higher education witnessed an expansion during the past and present eras.
- The necessity for comprehensive planning in this field.
- The need to bridge the gaps among higher education institutions.

- The need to design an effective mechanism to investigate all aspects of this type of education.

An examination of the list of Council members shows the absence of two important members who should have been included, for they would make a valuable contribution to the Council's debates on planning, training and education. One represents the Ministry of Health, which is in charge of health education and training, and supervises many of the health institutes and colleges of nursing around the country. In addition, the Health Minister is the Chairman of the Council for the Institute of Banking.

The other member would represent the Ministry of the Civil Service, which is responsible for the planning, training and education of the labour force in the public sector. In addition to being in charge of the Staff Scholarships Committee, the Ministry controls the central administration of staff appointments for all public institutions. The relevant department examines the suitability of candidates by checking their qualifications and experience, and processes all the documentation until the positions are filled. Therefore, the Ministry decides the overall need for specialists and labour for all the public institutions throughout the country. (Saudi Arabia led the way by including the head of the Council for the Ministry of the Civil Service in the Council for Higher Education) (al-Dā'uud, 1996: 306).

According to the Royal Decree, the objectives of the Council for Higher Education are as follows:

- Drafting of the general policy for higher education and scientific research, in addition to its direction and implementation according to local needs.

- Investigation into the problems facing higher education and recommendations for appropriate solutions.
- Review of the laws and regulations governing higher education.
- Co-ordination of the work of all similar departments in the institutions of higher education.

It is true that the establishment of the Council for Higher Education was very necessary at this stage to create a suitable mechanism for co-ordinating the institutions of higher education. As mentioned earlier, there was poor co-ordination among these institutions, which led to the introduction of identical programmes. This resulted in a surplus of graduates in certain subjects, not all of whom could be absorbed in the employment sector. Thus the government considered other options such as retraining graduates in other programmes introduced locally and abroad. Examples of such institutions are the Islamic Studies Department in Sultan Qaboos University; Sultan Qaboos Institutes for Islamic Studies, which are affiliated to the Royal Court; and the Juristic and Counselling Institute of the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

This situation persuaded the government to open an educational training institute, although when the number of its students decreased, it was closed. The alternative was to introduce educational training programmes in the University College of Education, and send a number of graduates in science, arts and Islamic studies to Jordan to train for a qualification in education and recruit them as teachers.

The academic committee, which was established in 1998 to evaluate the University, recommended forming a Council to be responsible for developing the

higher education sector in Oman. The government immediately considered this recommendation (McBrierty, Strauch, Westling, Carroll, 1998: 74).

During the first two years, the Council investigated some important questions, for example:

- increasing the capacity of the institutions of higher education;
- granting 1,000 fellowships to students from low-income families to study at private colleges;
- paving the way for the private sector to establish private universities, with facilities and services to be provided by the government without the imposition of taxes;
- allowing highly qualified academic staff from both the private and public sectors to teach in the institutions of higher education;
- authorizing Sultan Qaboos University to act as a consulting body for public departments and public and private institutions in all social and developmental projects.

(Royal Decree no. 67/2000)

A close examination of the objectives of the Council for Higher Education does not give any clear indication of the relationship between the Council and private institutions of higher education such as universities, colleges and training institutes. This could result in misunderstanding when analysing and comparing the objectives of the Council with those of the Ministry of Higher Education. These objectives were modified in 2000, taking into consideration that the Ministry of Higher Education was established in 1994, four years before the establishment of the Council for Higher Education.

During the second educational conference, held at Sultan Qaboos University between 23 and 25 October 2000, to discuss the privatization of higher education, a paper proposed that the Council for Higher Education should include members of all state and private universities. This proposal is worth considering if private education at this level is expected to perform according to the overall objectives of higher education and apply the same system as that followed by the state (al- Bīlāwī, 2000: 29).

Despite the above weaknesses, the Council for Higher Education is considered an important landmark in the development of education in Oman, a country whose leadership continually seeks to improve conditions and to keep up with the latest developments, which could result in national prosperity and the public good.

4.2 Ministry of Higher Education

The government realized that higher education should be separated from state education at school level for the following reasons:

- The number of secondary school leavers had doubled to 14,460 in 1994 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000a).
- There had been an increase in the number of registered students and pupils at all stages of general education, totalling 469,849 in 1994 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000b).

Such a situation put too much pressure on the senior administration of the Ministry of Education. In addition, the Minister of Education was also currently responsible for administering Sultan Qaboos University and the intermediate teacher-training colleges.

Therefore, Royal Decree 2/94 was issued to establish the Ministry of Higher Education as an independent body to take over this sector and concentrate on its planning and development. It was headed by a minister who was also the Head of the University Council (Royal Decree no. 2/94). Another Royal Decree – 15/94 – was issued to organize and assign the duties and responsibilities of the Ministry. These included the supervision of the institutions of higher education and scientific research centres such as Sultan Qaboos University, proposals of and research into policies for this sector, and the drafting of plans for their implementation where approved. Since the Ministry's responsibilities were restricted to external scholarships during the first year of its establishment, a Royal Decree (42/95) was issued to increase its range of duties by supervising Teacher-Training Colleges (al-Manthri, 1997: 1 & 2). At that time, Sultan Qaboos University was still under the direct supervision of the Minister of Higher Education.

This situation continued until 1997, when the government appointed a new Chancellor to the University, with the Minister of Higher Education as Chairman of its Council. After less than a year, the Ministry was separated from the University, whose Chancellor was now appointed Chairman of its Council according to the new regulations (Sultan Qaboos University, 1999a: 10).

The search for stability continued until it reached its peak at the end of the twentieth century, when Royal Decree no. 15/94, listing the responsibilities of the Ministry of Higher Education, was cancelled and replaced with a new Decree: no. 36/2000. This Decree reorganized the Ministry's responsibilities according to the latest developments such as the formation of the Council for Higher Education, the private University project, and the independent status of Sultan Qaboos University.

For the first time the main objectives of the Ministry were defined. Examples are as follows:

- Assessment, evaluation and accreditation of degrees and other qualifications granted by universities, colleges, institutions of higher education and research institutions.
- Checking and registration of postgraduate certificates held by Omanis, according to the rules and regulations, so as to allocate the correct titles.
- Following the necessary procedures to obtain external acknowledgement of qualifications and certificates awarded by local institutions of higher education.
- Issuing licences for the establishment of private universities, colleges and institutions of higher education (Royal Decree 36/2000).

From this list of objectives, it is evident that the government wished to ensure the quality of higher education following the increase in the number of its institutions, and the variability of its programmes and application mechanism. Steps were taken to evaluate and record qualifications carefully, and correct and strict procedures were applied to all the activities in this sector. This reflects the demands of the current period, which is distinguished by its quality as opposed to its quantity. Sultan Qaboos emphasized this trend in his speech to the University students in 2000, when he said: "The aim of education is not to obtain a paper certificate ... we should like to see students having a proper education and valid knowledge: a student who thinks well, adds and enriches culture and science in all its branches" (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000: 2).

The accelerated development and progress of the role of higher education in Oman encouraged the new Ministry to seek stability among other service ministries.

Consequently, new directorates were created such as the Directorate General of Planning and Development, Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges, which was separated from the Directorate General of Higher Colleges and Institutes –the latter was renamed the Directorate General of Colleges of Education. In addition, Omani staff with postgraduate qualifications were appointed to senior administrative positions in the Ministry.

It has become evident that the Ministry plays a vital role in formulating policies for higher education, determining its requirements, implementing its projects in collaboration with the Council for Higher Education and all public departments supervising the institutions of higher education. It is thought that the next stage will be a challenge for the Ministry for the following reasons:

- The huge increase in the number of secondary school leavers.
- The limited capacity of the institutions of higher education.
- The high cost of education.
- Quality assurance.
- The innovation and updating of educational programmes and curricula.
- The establishment of private universities, requiring extra monitoring to ensure conformity with all the relevant legislation.

This mission might be difficult to achieve unless the Ministry puts its faith in qualified staff who can manage the present situation and are aware of future trends.

The Council for Higher Education can make a valuable contribution to the development of higher education in Oman only if it is allowed a direct role in the evaluation, planning and organization of this sector. However, the Council should not be used as a means of secret competition among those of its members who

represent the institutions of higher education, each seeking to eliminate the role of the others and claim a higher proportion of the benefits allocated to them.

Shortly after the establishment of the Council, rumours spread that the Ministry of Higher Education was likely to be abolished, although it had been in existence for only four years. This could be true, for its responsibilities had been gradually reduced, beginning with the abolition or reduction of the role of the teacher-training colleges and the College of Shari'ah and Law. It has already been discussed how the University gained independent status after it was affiliated to the Ministry of Higher Education. If the Ministry is abolished, this will not be a new event in the Arab world. In Jordan, for example, higher education is controlled at times by a Council or a Ministry. Maybe the situation in Jordan is different from Oman, for stability in this sector has not yet been achieved.

Three questions can be raised here:

1. Is the Council, with its current structure and system, qualified to perform the legislative and executive duties in administering the institutions of higher education?
2. Should the Council for Higher Education supervise these institutions, including the University, health institutes, technical colleges, colleges of education, the College of Shari'ah and Law, the Institute of Banking, and private colleges?
3. Will the Council have qualified administrative and technical staff to perform such a role?

Such questions should be investigated by specialists before abolishing the Ministry. This is especially important, because higher education has not achieved stability

owing to the lack of clear vision and appropriate planning in many aspects of its organization and administration.

4.3 College of Shari'ah and Law

In his speech at the 24th National Day festival, held on 18 November 1994, a few months after the arrest of the members of an extremist network, Sultan Qaboos spoke of the importance of stability and security of work and production. He emphasized the consolidation of the country's achievements, advised against the importation of foreign ideas and beliefs, and encouraged people to adhere to Islamic principles and show friendship and tolerance. He also referred to extremism in faith, and asked people to strive in their acquisition of knowledge and religious awareness, so as to create guidelines that were appropriate for modern times, on which to base solutions to current problems (Sultan Qaboos 1994).

The year 1994 also witnessed a marked change in Omani politics, when greater attention was given to widening public representation in Parliament. This was done by increasing the number of the members of the *Shura* Council to 80 and by including the participation of Omani women for the first time (Sultan Qaboos, 1994a).

Following this new attitude to religion, security, tolerance and public participation was an announcement by Sultan Qaboos on 18 November 1994 about the establishment of the College of Shari'ah and Law. It was also announced that the Higher Institute of Justice would be located in Nizwa, a city in the interior of Oman (Sultan Qaboos, 1994). This project was first entrusted to the Ministry of Higher Education, and then to the Ministry of Justice. To date, however, it has not been achieved.

The premises of the College of Shari‘ah and Law were built in al-Watayah, a suburb of the Governate of Muscat, replacing the Secondary Islamic Institute. The design is typical of Omani architecture as represented by arches, inscriptions and a large mosque in front of the main building. In the grounds are lawns and fountains. After the completion of the project in mid-1997, Royal Decree no. 26/97 was issued to confirm the official establishment of the College. The Decree defined its objectives, structure, budget, Board of Trustees, Councils, administrative duties and even the language of instruction.

The main objectives of the College are:

- Training students in the Islamic religion and law to enable them to qualify in these subjects and seek employment in law, the judiciary and Islamic affairs.
- Developing scientific research in Islamic Shari‘ah, law and Islamic culture.
- Providing a specialized consultancy service to educational and public institutions and other establishments.
- Promoting specialized training programmes (Royal Decree no. 26/97).

From these objectives, it is evident that the College trains students who will occupy positions such as lawyers, judges, legislative and Shari‘ah researchers, counsellors and preachers. In addition, graduates are qualified for employment in criminal investigation and general prosecution. Ministerial Decree no. 33/97 was issued to give the Executive Board of the College the details of the system to be followed. It described the programme of study, the requirements for graduation, college administration, teaching and support staff, and terms of admission.

The College applies the credit-hour system. To qualify, students must complete 140 credit hours over four academic years. The academic year is divided

into two terms. The first year is devoted to general subjects, after which students can specialize in either: Islamic Shari'ah or Law, in addition to taking courses in Principles of Religion and Islamic Culture (Ministerial Decision 33/97).

The College began the first academic year of 1997/98 with 120 students. The official opening ceremony took place on 7 December 1997 under the auspices of the Minister of National Heritage and Culture (College of Shari'ah and Law, 2000: 7), who was chosen for this occasion to reflect the College's concept of linking tradition with modernity. Tradition is represented by the attention given to Islamic Shari'ah and culture, and modernity by the study of current law and other Islamic Shari'ah sciences from a modern viewpoint. This is an example of the line followed by the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture, which was established with the aim of linking Omani heritage and culture with the trends of the current age.

The College of Shari'ah and Law conceived a plan unique to institutions of higher education: a survey was carried out to discover the needs of public institutions for its graduates. There is a list of such institutions showing the long-term requirement for graduates during the first fifteen years of the College's existence; that is until 2012/13. The total number required is 341 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2001). This number is not proportionate to the number of graduates expected after fifteen years, provided that the annual intake of students, currently 120, remains the same. At the end of this period, there will be an accumulated total of 1,800 graduates. Nevertheless, more graduates will be needed for other public institutions such as the Police Department, the Ministry of Justice, Sultan Qaboos University and the Administrative Court. This is besides the need for national qualified lawyers.

Table 4.1 shows the numbers of students registered with the College after the first four years of its existence. From the table it can be seen that:

1. The number of registered students decreased gradually over the four-year course of study owing to their leaving the College for different reasons, the most important of which was being offered rewarding employment. Nine students abandoned their fourth-year programme, leaving 111 to complete the course. In addition, five students abandoned the third-year programme and another five the second-year programme.
2. The number of male students remained the same at 87 during the last three years, whereas the number of female students did not exceed the 41 of the first year. This could be attributed to the fact that few Omani women study law, or that the government limited the intake of female students.
3. Of the total intake of students, 40 per cent enrolled to study Shari'ah. However, there is another judiciary institute that provides almost the same course. This could result in a surplus of graduates in this subject. The Sultan Qaboos Institutes for Islamic Studies were closed, together with the Shari'ah Department in Sultan Qaboos University. This persuaded the authorities to train their graduates as teachers by implementing a training programme at local and sending people abroad.

Table 4.1 College of Shari'ah and Law: No. of students 2000/01

Subject	General		Shari'ah		Law		Total		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	Total
1 st year	87	41	0	0	0	0	87	41	128
2 nd year	0	0	33	15	54	14	87	29	116
3 rd year	0	0	30	15	57	14	87	29	116
4 th year	0	0	26	19	55	11	81	30	111
Total	87	41	89	49	166	39	342	129	471

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2000.

Another point that should be mentioned here is that the proportion of nationals employed at the college increased prior to the graduation of the first intake of students. It reached 50 per cent in the academic posts, and 94 per cent in the administrative posts in 2000 (see Table 4.2). The sixth five-year plan aims to increase the overall proportion of Omani staff to 90 per cent by the end of 2005 (Ministry of National Economy, 2000: 18).

Table 4.2 College of Shari'ah & Law: Academic and administrative staff

Post	Total no. of employees	No. of Omanis	No. of non-Omanis	Omanis as proportion of total
Academic	22	11	11	50%
Administrative	47	44	3	94%

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Sixth Five-Year Plan (2001–2005).

The number of registered students during the academic year 2000/2001 was 471, with the proportion of students to teachers 24.1 to 1. This is a reasonable ratio for theoretical subjects. Each student costs the Ministry 3,529 Omani riyals (9,189 US. Dollars) per year according to the Sixth Five-Year Plan (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000c: 21). The College Board of Trustees comprises the following members (Royal Decree 26/97):

Minister of Higher Education, Chairman

Minister of Justice

Minister of *Awqaf* and Islamic Affairs

Minister of Legal Affairs

Chief of Staff of Police and Customs

Chief of the Criminal Court

Chief of the Commercial Court

Under-Secretary for Higher Education

A close look at the structure of the committee shows that it has been beneficial to the College; especially at the beginning, with respect to the planning of programmes, the proposal for a function mechanism, the selection of teaching staff and the evaluation of current academic and administrative practices in the College. Nevertheless, such a structure could hinder the efficient functioning of the College, since all the members have a variety of duties and responsibilities, which is one of the reasons why meetings are held at long intervals.

After the graduation of the first intake of students, it would be appropriate for the College to restructure its Board of Trustees. The new structure could include a number of specialists who are directly connected with the work of the college and better acquainted with the details of specific issues, which are discussed at the meetings. These members could be the general directors of different ministries and departments currently represented on the Board, in addition to representatives from Sultan Qaboos University, the Administrative Court and the bar sector.

4.3.1 Occupational Conflict within the College

The situation of the College of Shari'ah and Law is similar to that of Sultan Qaboos University with regard to occupational and intellectual conflict among academic staff. The conflict arises between the law lecturers, on the one hand, and the Shari'ah lecturers inside and outside the College on the other. The result of this situation is that most students enrol in the Shari'ah School, even though employment in this area is limited. The Shari'ah lecturers have supported this trend because they believe that

law studies conflict with the principles of the Islamic Shari‘ah. Replacing the Dean of the College, who is a professor of Law and one of the founding members, with another professor of Shari‘ah is a result of such conflict.

Therefore, it is suggested that the authorities should use all possible means to put an end to this conflict so as to maintain the college objectives. It might help if the College rules and regulations were modified so as to allow the position of Dean to be filled by a professor from each School in rotation.

4.4 Higher Education in the Private Sector

During the 1990s, Oman witnessed the establishment of a few institutions of higher education managed by the private sector. This experiment should be given special attention, such as an investigation into the reasons for introducing this type of education and an assessment of public opinion expressed at local, regional and international level. The aim is to draw a clear picture of private higher education, which has become as popular as state higher education. In some industrialized countries, private education at this level is considered superior to state education.

4.4.1 General Perspective

The privatization of higher education is not a recent phenomenon in international economics. In some countries, this type of education was available way back in history (Jandhyala, 1991: 271) and was the only option until the establishment of state education. In the Middle Ages, private institutions of higher education in Europe were established and run by student unions or staff unions. They were usually affiliated to religious foundations or supported by district governors (Fahmī, 2000: 2).

Private higher education in the Arab world appeared prior to the emergence of state education, and was in the form of religious or missionary institutions (Dhīyāb & Suumān, 1999: 6). These institutions were administered by Muslim scholars, such as al-Azhar University in Egypt and al-Zaytouna University in Tunisia, or members of the Christian clergy or missionaries as in the Lebanon.

In Oman, private education was established many centuries ago and was available in mosques, private houses, public buildings and forts. Most of these institutions were known to those concerned with education, such as the teachers, rulers, public figures, the upper classes and scholars. This education was financed by grants and donations, or the payment of fees. Sometimes the teaching was voluntary. Some rulers and public figures used to engage governesses and tutors to teach the children at home.

Subjects taught at these establishments included religion, Arabic, history, astronomy, literature and poetry. Private schools were the only education available till the beginning of the 1970s. The American Missionary School was located in the capital city of Muscat, and there were other private schools around the country. These schools were closed when state schools were opened throughout the Sultanate (al-Dhahab, 1987: 87 & 96).

Owing to developments in the global economy, the accelerated progress of information science and technology, and the marked increase in population, there has been a resurgence of interest in private higher education. In some developed countries, it has been given more attention and developed further than state education. In 1994, for example, the proportion of students in private higher education was 79 per cent in Korea, 74 per cent in Japan, 32 per cent in Jordan and

22 per cent in the United States (Rajab & al-Kubaysi, 2001: 19). It was at that time that Oman began to allow the private sector to invest in higher education.

The recent economic developments, especially following the collapse of the Soviet Union, as well as the introduction of liberalism and the so-called market economics, have led to the reconsideration of many principles, including those of education. One major characteristic of this change is reviewing the responsibility of the state for education, and the need to allow the private sector to participate in this process, for it is this sector that is mainly in charge of the development, investment and production in any country. Nevertheless, the call to establish private universities was not attributed to the economic changes, but rather to the difficulties that the governments faced in financing the development of state higher education (Jandhyala, 1991: 3). In Oman the government has failed to meet the private sector requirements, which were to enable this sector to absorb the increasing number of secondary school leavers. Of the total output of 27,000 secondary school leavers in 1999/2000, only 8,693 were admitted to institutions of higher education (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000b).

The increase in the secondary school output is an international problem, which each country is trying to solve so as to secure higher education for the majority of its students. The aim is to train them to be productive and self-reliant. The number of secondary school leavers around the world rose to 372 million between 1991 and 1995 (UNESCO, 1998a: 3).

Apart from Egypt, which established higher education as early as the 1930s, other Arab countries provided private higher education only recently, since the state universities had failed to satisfy the needs of the public from the point of view of

quantity and quality. Currently, there are 72 private universities in the Arab world, making 41 per cent of the total number of Arab universities (al-Jawharī, 1996: 98).

The trend in investing in private higher education in the Arab world could be attributed to the following reasons:

- The increasing demand for higher education as a result of rapid population growth. People consider a university degree to be the stepping-stone to better employment opportunities (Maḥmuud, 2001).
- The increasing number of female students enrolling in institutions of higher education. Some of these institutions admit more women than men.
- The limited capacity of state universities and their failure to meet the increasing demand, as well as the inability of many universities to handle the latest technology.
- Budget deficits in many Arab countries have hindered the achievement of many development programmes.
- The establishment of most of the Arab universities in the main cities, which has resulted in the migration of young people from the rural areas in their search for higher education (Fahmī, 2000: 4).
- The need for university graduates in the Arab countries to participate in the labour market, for they currently comprise only 3–4 per cent of the overall labour force (Dhīyāb & Suumān, 1999: 2).
- The increase in the number of students going to foreign countries. There are nearly 207,000 Arab students studying abroad and spending approximately US\$2 billion annually (Dhīyāb & Sūmān, 1999: 2).

- Giving those pupils with poor examination results who are not admitted to the state universities the opportunity to pursue their education in the private institutions of higher education (Basyuunī, 2000: 31).
- Allowing those in employment to continue their higher education on a part-time basis (ʿĪsān & al-Shanfārī, 2000: 10).

It could be said that these reasons are also applicable to the emergence of private higher education in Oman. The proportion of people under the age of 24 is 68.1 per cent of the total population of Oman according to the 2000 census (Ministry of National Economy, 2001: 49). Such a high percentage is a source of concern to the public services sector, mainly the Ministry of Higher Education. The situation has persuaded the Cabinet and the Ministry to include the problem of absorbing the secondary school output in the agenda of their annual meeting, which is held every summer, at the time when a batch of these pupils finishes the secondary stage. Although recommendations are made at the end of each meeting, they are usually temporary solutions, for they do not cover all the relevant aspects of the problem. The recommendations are not comprehensive and do not meet the requirements of developmental planning. An example of such a solution was a proposal by the Cabinet in 1998 to increase the capacity of the institutions of higher education to admit an extra 2,000 applicants. However, the proposal was valid for only one year, so the problem appeared yet again after that time. In 2000, the government allocated 1,000 fellowships to the low-income applicants and those covered by the social security scheme to be admitted to the private colleges in Oman. This number was increased to 1,500 fellowships in 2001 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2001a).

Because the opportunities for higher education are limited for Omani applicants at the local level, a large number of them travel abroad to enrol at universities in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, the United States, Kuwait, Egypt, India and other countries (Gregory, 2001: 3). According to the Ministry of Higher Education statistics, 2,172 students were admitted to universities abroad for the academic year 2000/01. Of this number, 1,438 were women, and 1,881 male and female students paid their own way. Statistics show that the number of Omanis studying abroad totalled 12,103 in the year 2002 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002).

These facts show that there is a high demand for higher education despite the limited financial resources. Oman is not a rich country and more money spent on higher education means that there is less available for other important areas such as state schools, health, transport, security etc.

4.4.2 Private Colleges in Oman

To solve such a complicated problem, the government in 1996, under pressure from the business community, permitted the private sector to invest in higher education by opening private colleges. This positive move was controlled by strict conditions – which should be taken into account by investors in this area – for the government wished to avoid the problems of random investment, faced by other countries such as the United Arab Emirates. In 1991, the UAE government had to establish a Ministry of Higher Education to organize the management of many private higher education institutions, which were functioning without any clear structure, regulations or quality control (Shahīn, 1996:38).

Dr Said Salmān, Chairman of the Arab Private University Union and Chancellor of Ajman University for Science and Technology in the UAE, described this critical situation as follows:

There have been unplanned procedures in the field of higher education as the goals of some investors in this area were merely to make profits. Some of the institutions did not apply standards of higher education and quality assurance and control. As a result, some institutions issue a degree in medicine after four years of study, and others qualify a student as an engineer at the age of 15! (Salmān, 1996: 63)

Therefore the planners of higher education in the Gulf Co-operation Council States demanded the drafting of standards and regulations to license private higher education. This demand was echoed in the 5th Annual Meeting of the Ministers of Higher Education in the Gulf States, which was held in Muscat in February 2000 (Secretariat-General of the Gulf Co-operation Council, 2000).

Similar concern was also expressed by the Ministries of Higher Education of the Arab States in the first conference of its kind to be held in Lebanon in September 2000. The conference put forward a few recommendations for the drafting of rules and regulations to control various aspects of private higher education. It was also recommended that investment in higher education should be facilitated, taking into account the demand for certain subjects of study and quality assurance. The conference invited the private sector investors to support scientific research (ALECSO, 2000).

These two meetings were preceded by the 7th Annual Meeting of Higher Education Planners and Experts of the Arab countries, which was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, in 1999. This meeting recommended that the Arab University Union and the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) call for a meeting of Arab experts. The aim of this meeting was to devise regulations

and standards, in conformity with which the private sector could be authorized to invest in higher education, taking into consideration quality assurance and control (ALECSO, 1999: 4).

Bearing these factors in mind, the authorities in Oman gave careful thought to the establishment of private higher education. The first step was to issue a Royal Decree, 18/1996, allowing the establishment of private colleges and institutes offering post-secondary education in a range of science subjects. The aims of these colleges were as follows (al-Manthri, 2000: 18–19):

- Promoting social and economic development so as to meet the local requirements for qualified human resources.
- Participating in improving the quality of administration by equipping a generation of Omanis with administrative skills at intermediate level. The aim was to produce staff qualified to occupy future leading positions in both the public and private sectors.
- Encouraging and supporting scientific research.

It is noticeable that most of the programmes in the private colleges established between 1995 and 2002 focus on business administration. This subject even forms part of the name of four of the colleges (see Table 4.3).

From an examination of the table, the following points can be made:

1. The first fourteen colleges were established in the second half of the 1990s, except for Majan College – former name the College of Administrative Sciences – which was opened as the first private college in Oman before Royal Decree 18/1996 was issued regarding private higher education. It was the Chamber of

Commerce and Industry which took the initiative to establish this college, a step towards enhancing private higher education in Oman.

2. Six of these colleges are affiliated to British institutions of higher education, three to American universities and two to Indian Institutions. This affiliation shows the strong relationship between the institutions of higher education in Oman and their counterparts in Britain. It is also likely that most of the founders of these colleges received their education in Britain. Most of the colleges are located in the Muscat area, except for three, which are situated in the three provincial capitals of Sohar, Salalah and Sur.

This arrangement could be one of the reasons for the weak performance of some colleges, for each tries to attract more students than the others by offering similar programmes. It would have been better if the colleges had been distributed among the more densely populated cities. Thus they could have absorbed more students, developed their programmes of study and added other programmes to meet the increasing demand for higher education. It is also worthy note that most of the affiliations with British universities are with former colleges which were upgraded to university status recently. Some of these universities have problems of fundamental kind, for example low or non-existent recognized research performance. Such institutions can hardly be said to be suitable to guide the development of higher education in Oman. The absence of the name of one reputable British University in Table 4.3 speaks volumes.

Table 4.3 Establishment of Private Colleges in Oman

College	Date of establishment	Area	Programmes	Affiliation
College of Administrative Science (Majan College)	1995	Muscat	Business Administration, Accounting, Finance, Computing, Communications, Marketing, Travel & Tourism	Luton University, UK
Modern College of Business Science	1996	Muscat	Business Administration, Accounting, Computing, Banking, Economics, Management & Information System	Missouri Univ., St Louis, USA
Caledonian College of Engineering	1996	Muscat	Civil, Electronic and Mechanical Engineering, Engineering Management	Caledonian Univ., UK
The Fire Safety Engineering College	1997	Muscat	Courses in Fire Safety, Drilling and Safety	Central Lancashire University., UK
Sohar College of Applied Sciences	1998	Sohar	Engineering, Computing, Business Administration, Business Studies	Lincolnshire Univ., UK Humberside Univ., UK
Muscat College of Management Science and Technology	1998	Muscat	Communications, Computing, Business Administration, Engineering	Perth College, UK
National College of Science and Technology	1998	Salalah	Business Administration, Computing, Accounting	Westminster University., London, UK
Mazoon College of Management and Applied Science	1999	Muscat	Business Administration, Accounting, Computing, Information System Management, English Language	Missouri Univ., St Louis, USA
Al-Zahra College for Girls	1999	Muscat	Business Administration, Finance and Banking Management, Computing, English Language	Amman National Univ., Jordan
Oman Medical College	2001	Muscat/ Sohar	Doctor of Medicine, Bachelor of Science	West Virginia University- USA
Sur University College	2001	Sur	Management and Marketing, Accounting, Finance and Banking, Business Information System, Information Technology, Hotel Management and Tourism	Melbourne University Private- Australia
Oman Tourism and Hospitality Academy	2001	Muscat	Tourism and Hospitality Management	University of Applied Management Science+ Institute of Tourism and Management- Austria
Waljat College of Applied Sciences	2001	Muscat	Computer Science & Engineering, Electronics and Communication Eng., Biotechnology Eng., Business Admin-Information Technology Management	Birla Institute of Technology - India
Middle East College of Information Technology	2002	Muscat	Software Technology, Hardware Technology & Networking, Internet Technology	Manipal Academy of Higher Education – India

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Muscat, 2002.

4.4.3 Student Populations of the Private Colleges

Registered students in all the private colleges totalled 5,715 for the academic year 2001/02 (Table 4.4). Of this number, 2,788 were female, comprising 49 per cent. In 2001/02, the proportion of private students was 22.1 per cent of the total number of Omani students admitted at institutions of higher education in Oman and outside Oman. In the private colleges, the student-teacher ratio is 13:1, compared with 13.7:1 in state education (Īsān & al-Shanfārī, 2000: 2). Figure 4.1 shows the percentage of student population of the private colleges in the academic year 2001/02.

The private colleges admit both Omani and non-Omani students, most of the latter coming from the families of expatriate staff working in Oman. There are also students who have enrolled for part-time courses, because some of them are employed and others are housewives. Table 4.5 shows the numbers of the different types of students.

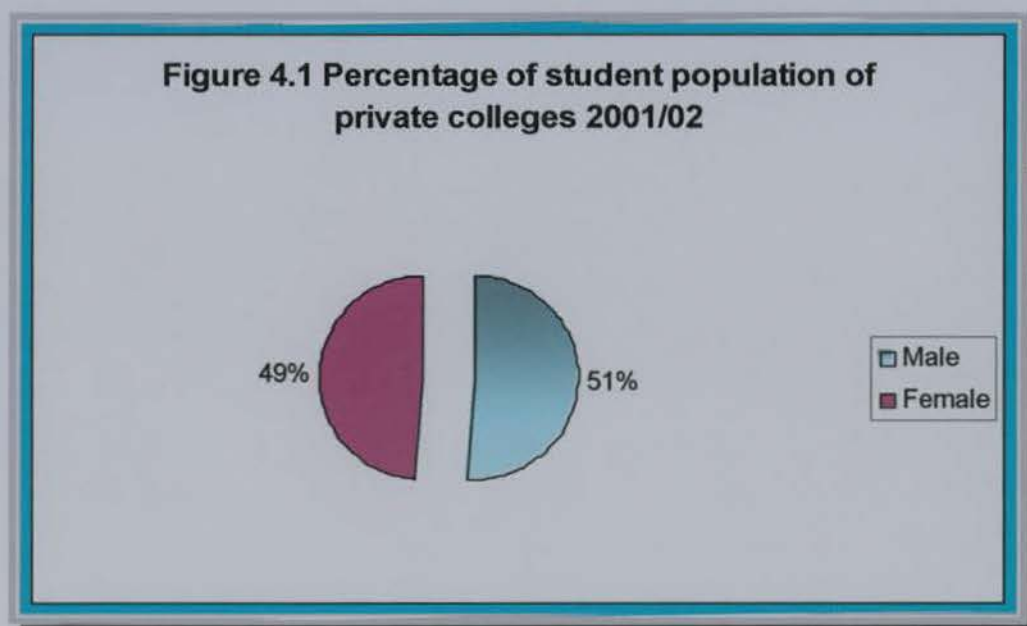


Table 4.4 Private colleges: Registered students 2001/02

College	Students		
	Male	Female	Total
Majan College	527	313	840
Modern College of Business Science	392	262	654
Muscat College	224	81	305
Oman Tourism & Hospitality Academy	134	85	305
The Fire Safety Engineering College	57	5	62
Al-Zahra College	0	623	623
Mazoon College	32	574	606
Waljat College	25	23	48
Caledonian College of Engineering	544	71	615
Sur University College	141	106	247
Oman Medical College	8	61	69
National College	428	183	611
Sohar University	415	401	816
Total students	2,927	2,788	5,715

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2002.

According to Table 4.6, the proportion of male graduates was 75 per cent. The reason for this situation could be that most of the male students had specialized in science subjects at school, for fewer female students follow this programme. Future years may witness a change towards equal proportions of male and female students in science subjects, especially since there are now two private colleges which have a large number of female students, namely, Mazoon College and Al-Zahra College for Girls.

Table 4.5 Private colleges: Omani and non-Omani students 2001

Type of course		Non-Omani students		Omani students		
Part-time	Full-time	Female	Male	Female	Male	Total
517	2,851	48	77	1,455	1,788	3,368

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2001.

Table 4.6 Private college graduates 1997/98–1999/2000

College	Graduates		
	Male	Female	Total
Modern College of Business Science	34	19	53
Caledonian College of Engineering	169	23	192
College of Administrative Science	22	32	54
Muscat College of Management Science & Technology	36	18	54
Sohar College of Applied Science	11	—	11
The Fire Safety Engineering College	5	—	5
Total	277	92	369

Source: Ministry of Higher Education.

4.4.4 Private Universities Project

Although private higher education began with the establishment of colleges that awarded diplomas or bachelor degrees, private sector investors also considered establishing universities, which could be financed by the private sector and supported by the government.

To this end, Royal Decree 41/99 was issued, allowing the private sector to found universities on the following basis. Omanis should own a high percentage of the capital and the goal of such universities should not be profit-making (Royal Decree 41/99). The Minister of Higher Education then issued Decree 36/99, stating the bylaws of private universities, including the establishment procedure, terms for

holders of senior and leading posts, conditions of staff appointments, student affairs, finance, the relationship with other public institutions and the penalty system (Ministerial Decision no. 36/99).

To keep pace with such rapid developments in higher education, changes had to be made to the structure of the Ministry of Higher Education. Consequently, Royal Decree 70/2000 was issued to establish the Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges, and Decree 71/2000 to rename the Directorate General of High Colleges and Institutes as the Directorate General for Colleges of Education (Royal Decree no. 70/2000).

Prior to the above decrees, Royal Decree 42/99 was issued regarding the establishment of private colleges and institutes of higher education, thus cancelling Decree 18/96. Consequently, private colleges could upgrade their diploma programmes to Bachelor degree programmes (Royal Decree no. 42/99). Then Ministerial Decree 34/2000 was issued, stating the bylaws of private colleges, and thus cancelling the regulations stated in the previous Decree 9/96 (Ministerial Decision no. 34/2000).

The above situation of issuing and cancelling decrees within a short time (1996–2000) shows that higher education in Oman has not attained stability. This is also true of private higher education. Investors are hesitant to invest in private universities, despite the provision of facilities by the government such as the allocation of suitable areas of land for constructing the premises. The government has not imposed taxes on the universities; on the contrary, it has contributed 50 per cent of the capital cost of each university, equal to a maximum of 3 million Omani riyals or 5.5 million pounds sterling (al-Manthri 2000: 24.).

Despite the increasing demand for higher education in Oman, slow progress has been made in its provision. For example, the establishment of a university in Nizwa, a provincial capital, at an estimated cost of 27 million Omani riyals (46 million pounds sterling), will not be achieved before the academic year 2004/05. It is also dependent on the extent of the response by investors, as was pointed out by one of the main people behind this project (al-Rawāhī, 2001: 3).

Omani society has become aware of the instability in higher education, resulting from the lack of steady application of comprehensive policies. An Omani scholar expressed the doubt in the public mind concerning the establishment of private universities. He pointed out that there had been secret government plans to establish a fee-paying state university in Muscat. If this plan had been carried out, there would have been no room in this field for private investors, who were still waiting for a clarification of the situation (al-Rawās, 2000: 26).

The project for a fee-paying university had been a controversial issue for the members of the Council for Higher Education for administrative affairs. The aim of the cancelled university project had been to merge colleges of education and technical industrial colleges into one university and to impose fees on the students, provided that its capacity remained the same. If this plan had been adopted, there would have been complaints from the public, which had been looking forward to greater opportunities of free state education (Personal Communication from the Council).

It should be pointed out that there are a few factors that should be borne in mind by the relevant parties when evaluating institutions of higher education in Oman. Examples are as follows:

1. The private sector, which is mainly concerned with profit, does not consider higher education to be the perfect social investment, owing to the changes in market economics.
2. It is likely that the private sector applies negative procedures to secure a greater and faster profit by imposing higher fees and focusing on commercial programmes, which aim at securing employment and professional success, without giving attention to knowledge, research, values and community service.
3. To attract more applicants, private sector institutions may impose very easy terms of admission, which result in an intake of low-quality students.
4. If the government reduces its contribution to higher education, it is likely that the private sector institutions will widen the social and economic divisions in society, for only those who can afford the fees will have the opportunity of further study.
5. To reduce costs, private institutions may employ inexperienced staff or depend on part-timers.
6. Some private colleges may be affiliated to the less reputable institutions of higher education abroad, which could result in the devaluation of their programmes and thus the lack of international recognition.

4.5 Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)

As was noted earlier, higher education in Oman did not acquire stability during the last decade of the twentieth century. SQU could be taken as an example of that period, for it witnessed many changes between 1997 and 2001. The University President was replaced three times and the Under-Secretary four times. In addition, the University structure was changed three times, until finally, the government appointed a President with experience in academic affairs. This step was the result of

the government's first survey of the management of the only University in the country by Omani academic staff since the establishment of the institution in 1986.

In addition to the above administrative and structural changes, new academic courses and subjects of study were introduced, directorates and administrative and academic centres were established, and the level of student admissions and graduates doubled. These changes are examined in detail in the following pages.

4.5.1 New Courses, Subjects of Study, and Departments

In 1993, the College of Commerce and Economics was established, thereby increasing the number of University colleges to seven (al-Hashmi, 1999: 43). Postgraduate Master's courses became available, first in the Colleges of Education and Arts in 1992/93, then in the College of Science in 1995/96, the College of Agriculture in 1996/97 and the College of Engineering in 1998/99 (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999c: 11). In 1999, the University introduced some training courses in collaboration with public institutions such as the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Economy. Diploma courses in computer science and education were introduced, with 780 students being admitted to both courses for the academic year 2000/01 (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000a: 1).

However, the diploma courses had been made available without any previous assessment of their academic and professional suitability by the Ministries of Higher Education and the Civil Service. This mistake resulted in a lack of employment opportunities for the diploma graduates, and those graduates who were already employed could not expect professional promotion despite their higher

qualifications. For these reasons the University closed the diploma programme in 2002 (Personal Communication from the two Ministries).

Although there had been close co-ordination between the University and the Ministry of Higher Education at all administrative, academic and technical levels, it weakened during the last three years of the 1990s. This could be attributed to the University being granted independence in its administration.

The 1990s also saw the introduction of new subjects of study to meet the needs of the labour market for qualified personnel. These subjects included natural gas engineering, mining engineering, petrochemical engineering, geophysical engineering, environmental biology and biotechnology.

At the structural level, two centres were established: student counselling and staff training. A deanship for postgraduate studies and research was created, but recently discontinued. The following directorates were introduced to ensure administrative stability: Planning and Development, Co-ordination and Administrative Monitoring, Administration and Finance, Technical Affairs, and Information and Public Relations (al-Suwaid, 1999: 11). These directorates were closed down in 2001 after the modification of the University structure.

4.5.2 Growth of Student Intake and Output

During the 1990s there was a marked increase in student intake. In 1990 the University admitted 850 students. This number rose to 1,219 in 1995 and 2,971 in 2000, including admissions to diploma, Bachelor's and Master's degree courses. This was an increase of 349.5 per cent. The number of registered students also rose from 3,021 in 1990 to 4,888 in 1995, and 10,678 in 2002, an increase of 353.5 per cent.

During the same period, the number of graduates rose from 283 in 1990 to 763 in 1995, and 1,590 in 2002, an increase of 561.8 per cent.

These statistics reflect the numerical increase in admissions, registrations and graduates. They are the result of the accelerated increase in the number of secondary school leavers on the one hand, and the labour market's need for qualified graduates on the other. It is also attributed to the social awareness of a university education as a means of advancing one's social and financial prospects. The capacity of the University was expanded with the introduction of academic and training courses, including diplomas and Master's degrees. This was accompanied by an expansion in the number of classrooms, laboratories, halls and supporting service premises. In 2002, there were 417 MA students, of whom 136 were female. The output of MA graduates began in 1995. In 2001, there were 124 MA graduates, of whom 50 were female (Sultan Qaboos University, 2002).

Table 4.7 shows the number of students admitted and graduating between 1986 and 2000. In 1990, the proportion of male students was 53 per cent compared with 47 per cent of female students. By 1993, the proportion of female students had risen to 53 per cent, but in 2000 the proportion of male students had climbed back to 52 per cent. These figures reflect the principle of equal opportunities in education, which is applied by the University when considering candidates for admission to its courses. Admission to the University and to a particular course depends on the grades achieved by a candidate in the Secondary School Certificate.

As pointed out in Chapter 3, at the time of its establishment in 1986, SQU benefited from the experience of other international universities. Sultan Qaboos stated in his speech at the inauguration ceremony that the University did not

implement any specific system (Ministry of Information, 1995: 245). Instead, it integrated a variety of international systems including the following:

- The French Napoleonic system, which aims at modernizing society and preserving its identity.
- The German system, which emphasizes research and education.
- The American system, which is based on utilitarian knowledge, service to society and links to the market economy, as well as the implementation of the credit-hour system.
- The British system, with its comprehensive university campus where students and staff constitute one community.

Table 4.7 Growth in student population: Diploma, Bachelor & Master's degrees 1986–2001

Year	Students admitted			Students registered			Students graduated		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1986	–	–	557	–	–	557	–	–	–
1987	–	–	624	–	–	1,057	–	–	–
1988	–	–	724	983	740	1,723	–	–	–
1989	402	347	749	1,374	1,099	2,473	–	–	–
1990	417	433	850	1,609	1,412	3,021	160	121	283
1991	386	438	824	1,634	1,632	3,266	282	207	489
1992	381	526	907	1,664	1,840	3,504	290	268	558
1993	466	640	1,106	1,736	2,154	3,890	323	314	637
1994	642	610	1,252	1,927	2,368	4,295	359	402	761
1995	600	619	1,219	2,299	2,589	4,888	321	442	763
1996	695	678	1,373	2,475	2,693	5,168	283	462	745
1997	890	954	1,844	2,899	2,956	5,855	329	547	876
1998	1,017	925	1,942	3,377	3,228	6,605	440	581	1,021
1999	1,100	1,059	2,159	3,870	3,660	7,530	538	603	1,141
2000	1,540	1,431	2,971	4,699	4,334	9,033	580	671	1,251
2001	1,565	1,897	3,462	5,431	5,247	10,678	705	885	1,590

Source: Department of Statistics, SQU, August 2002.

Admitting students by selection was also imported from the British System, which Britain itself tried to abandon in the 1980s (Neave, 1998: 21). SQU has

continued to follow this system, possibly because it is the only university in Oman, and because of its limited capacity and the high staffing costs.

Owing to its strict terms of admission, SQU could be classified as one of the internationally recognized universities for the elite. Sultan Qaboos emphasized its status when he addressed the University students in May 2000, for he stressed the importance of applying admission rules strictly to maintain the University's distinguished position (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000: 1). This status is held not only by SQU, but also by many other Asian and African universities, which are classified as catering only for the elites of their countries' populations in contrast with many American and European institutions of higher education. This could be attributed to the influence of the colonizing countries of earlier times, and to the low level of political and social participation by the African and Asian universities compared with those in the developed countries. In addition, the economic conditions intensified competition between basic and higher education after the colonies gained their independence, for both types were considered important (Scott, 1998: 18).

In Oman, the government began building the infrastructure from scratch in 1970. At that time, there were only three elementary schools with an enrolment of 909 boys and a teaching staff of no more than 30 (Ministry of Information & Youth Affairs, 1980: 80). Efforts were made to make state education available in all the cities and villages of the Sultanate, for it did not exist prior to the reign of Sultan Qaboos. This is why the state schools have been allocated the highest proportion of public expenditure. In 1998, they received 71 per cent of the total education budget, whereas only 29 per cent was allocated to higher education. Public expenditure on

both state school and higher education comprised 18.3 per cent of national expenditure in 1998 (Ministry of National Economy, 2000a: 7).

SQU is therefore classified as an eminent university for economic reasons: the recent modernization of the country and the increase in population balanced against the national income sourced from oil revenues, which have been used to establish the nation-wide infrastructure.

What has also distinguished the University has been the maintenance of quality assurance as represented in the student-teaching staff ratio. This ranges from 23 students to one member of the teaching staff in the College of Commerce and Economics, to 6 students in the College of Science. Table 4.8 shows the ratios of students to teaching staff in all the colleges. According to the table, the average student-teaching staff ratio was not more than 11.4 in the academic year 1999/2000. This level has contributed to the improvement in the University's educational standards. Compared with similar ratios in the universities of the other Gulf states,

Table 4.8 Student-staff ratio in the University Colleges: 1999/2000

College	No. of students	No. of teaching staff	Student-teaching staff ratio
Science	782	127	6.2
Arts	837	118	7.0
Agriculture	467	54	8.6
Medicine	628	69	9.1
Engineering	793	72	11.0
Education	2,327	131	17.8
Commerce & Economics	1,272	55	23.1
Total	7,106	262	11.4

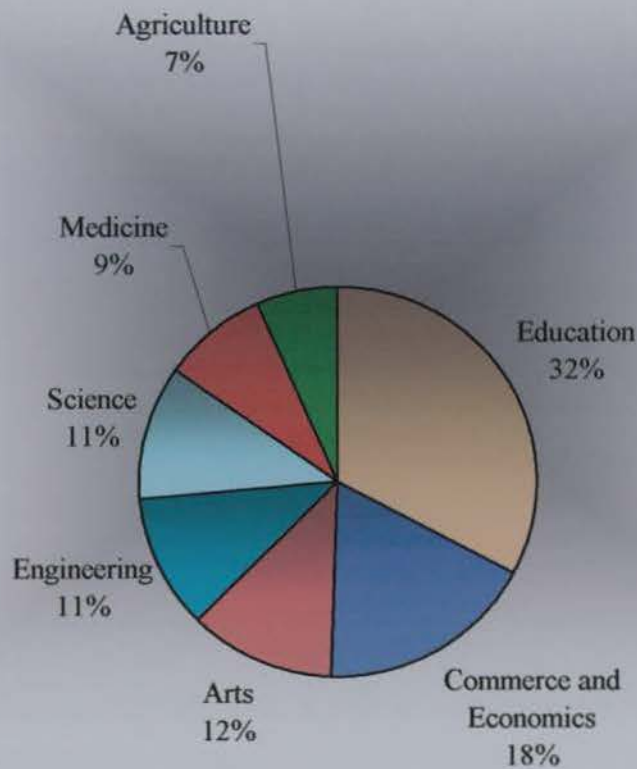
Source: Department of Statistics, SQU, Muscat, 2000.

SQU had the lowest ratio of students to teaching staff (9.1:1) in 1990/1991. In the other Gulf universities, the student–teaching staff ratios were as follows: University of Bahrain: 10.8:1; King Saud University, Saudi Arabia: 16.5:1; University of the United Arab Emirates: 17.2:1; Qatar University: 20.2:1; and King Abdulaziz University, Saudi Arabia: 28.9:1 (al-Urayyid , 1994: 251–252).

4.5.3 Science and Humanities Students

Since the opening of SQU in 1986, the number of humanities students, both registered and graduates has exceeded those taking science courses. In 1999/2000, for example, students at the College of Education constituted 32 per cent of the total student population. This was followed by the students at the College of Commerce and Economics with a proportion of 18 per cent, the College of Arts with 12 per cent, and the Colleges of Science with a proportion ranging from 7 per cent at the College of Agriculture to 11 per cent at the College of Engineering. Figure 4.2 gives the percentage of university students at the different Colleges.

Figure 4.2 Percentage of university students 1999/00



Source: Sultan Qaboos University, 2000.

The purpose of admitting more students, especially to the SQU College of Education, during the first ten years of the University's existence was to accelerate the Omanization of the teaching staff in state schools. The planned target has now been reached. Consequently, the University needs to reconsider the priorities of its admissions policy, and reallocate students to other colleges accordingly. If the University delays the application of a new policy, it is expected that a high percentage of graduates will not be able to find suitable employment in either the public or private sector. It should be noted that there were 420 unemployed University graduates in 1998 according to the statistics published by the Ministry of

the Civil Service. This number is high if compared with the size of the population of Oman (al-Burūmī, 1998: 20). It comprises 21.4 per cent of the 1,996 graduates in that year from SQU and the colleges of education, as well as other graduates who studied abroad on scholarships.

Table.4.9 No. of university students at the different Colleges: 2001/02

College	No. of registered Students	Percentage
Education	1,882	21.4
Commerce and Economics	1,756	19.9
Arts	1,514	17.2
Science	1,154	13.1
Engineering	1,076	12.1
Medicine	727	8.3
Agriculture	711	8.0

Source of data: Statistics book, SQU, Muscat 2002.

The authorities should attend to the problem of high graduate unemployment. They should examine the reasons for it and try to find effective solutions. Oman is a developing country with a small population, and there are vacancies available in both the public and private sectors, which are still occupied by expatriates. Many public departments assert that University graduates are not sufficiently qualified to be offered employment. However, it is said that employers prefer recruiting expatriates because they accept low salaries. The employers themselves are responsible for creating the problem of unemployment (Ammār, 1997: 133).

Sultan Qaboos emphasized the responsibility of employers for creating unemployment in his speech during the graduation ceremony of SQU in 1990, when he said:

Today, we are highlighting our directives to the public and private sectors that they should pay proper attention to the graduates. All departments should exert every possible effort to devise practical plans and programmes to train them to the standard required and to secure employment so as to enable them to perform their duties efficiently. (Ministry of Information, 1995)

It is evident that Sultan Qaboos had been aware of the importance of securing employment for graduates since the first intake of students graduated in 1990. He also apparently foresaw the difficulties that they might face in employment and professional training. The Sultan stressed the role of the employers in training University graduates to the standard required to enable them to perform their duties.

To return to the problem of the high proportion of Humanities students. It could be argued that this situation is not peculiar to SQU, for it also exists in the universities of the other Gulf States and worldwide. According to the Gulf States Education Office, most higher education graduates have studied theoretical subjects to the extent that they are surplus to the needs of the labour market. This situation has created varying levels of unemployment in the Gulf States (Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, 1999: 7). Other Arab countries also suffer from this problem (Abu Shuqra, 1991: 450).

The Islamic Education, Science and Culture Organization expressed its concerns during the first meeting of ministers of higher education, which was held in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia in 2000. They discussed the inappropriate planning of higher education in most member countries, for it did not match development needs at the economic and social levels. There was a problem in allocating students to the

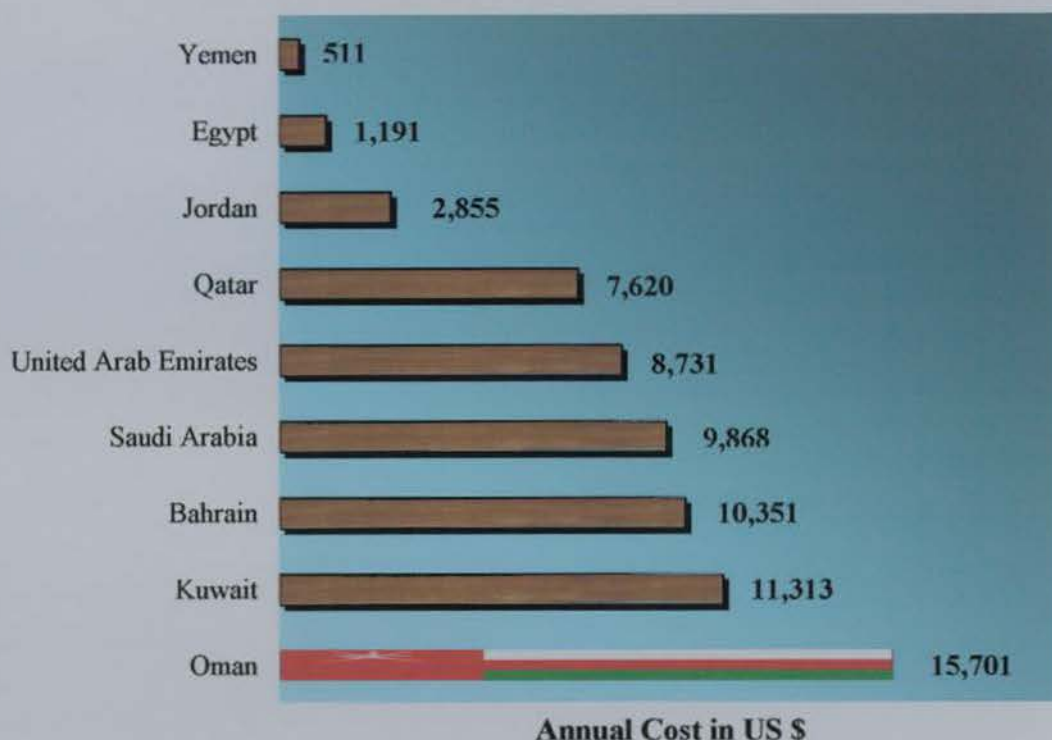
subjects available, for the majority followed courses in the humanities, arts and law, whereas only a minority studied science or technical subjects (ISESCO, 2000: 6).

Therefore, it is recommended that the needs of the labour market for graduates should be surveyed and a national strategy for the development of human resources should then be devised. This strategy should consider the ideal utilization of unemployed personnel (al-Jahwari, 2000: 15–25). It should be noted here that several local sectors mentioned such a strategy when expressing their concern about the situation through the national media.

4.5.4 How Much does Each Student Cost SQU?

It should be pointed out that cost of each student at SQU is the highest among the Arab countries according to a UNESCO report in 1996 (UNESCO, 1998b: 35). The annual cost of one SQU student is \$15,701, compared with \$11,313 for one university student in Kuwait, \$10,351 in Bahrain, and \$511 (the lowest) in Yemen. Figure 4.3 shows the annual cost of a university student in some of the Arab countries:

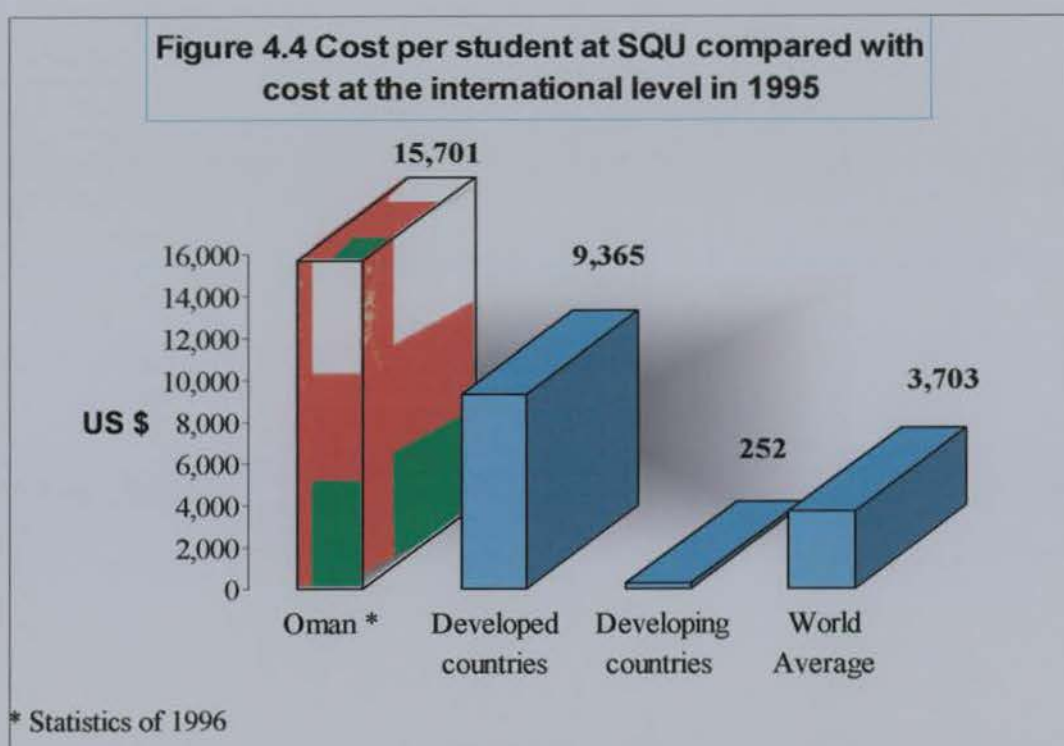
Figure 4.3 Cost of a university student in some Arab countries in 1996



Source: UNESCO Statistics, 1998.

As shown in Figure 4.3, the highest cost per university student, compared with other Arab countries, is in the Gulf States. The reason could be that these states spend generously on higher education by providing the universities with high-tech teaching and training equipment and recruiting highly qualified and experienced staff who are also highly paid. Like the other Gulf universities, SQU provides accommodation, catering, transport and a monthly allowance to students, all of which contribute to the University's total expenditure. Yet the cost of a SQU student is considerably higher than even in the other Gulf States. The reasons for such a marked difference should be investigated by the authorities and economies should be made in a way that does not affect the quality of education.

In this regard, the World Bank proposed reducing costs by requiring students to pay for accommodation and books. According to a World Bank survey of education in Oman in 2000, it was found that SQU was allocated about 18 per cent of the total budget for education. Only 2.1 per cent of the total number of school pupils and higher education students benefit from this allocation. On the other hand, state schools are allocated approximately 70 per cent of the total education budget, which benefits 96 per cent of the total number of pupils (World Bank, 2000: 29). At the international level, the cost per SQU student is classified as one of the highest, as shown in Figure 4.4



Source: *International Education Conference Statistics*, UNESCO, Paris, 1998.

Clearly, the cost per university student in Oman, which is a developing country, is much higher than that in other developing or developed countries. The cost of a SQU student is even four times the world average of \$3,703.

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that the relevant authorities and education specialists should evaluate this high cost. This is essential if the University is to progress smoothly. There should be a rationalization of expenditure by all departments, for the budget allocations are steadily increasing. The high cost of a SQU student could be attributed to many reasons, some of which are as follows:

- The running costs of the University practice hospital, with 300 beds, were 16 million Omani Riyals in 1999 (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000b: 354).
- The provision of workshops, laboratories and equipment for the colleges of technology and science.
- The staffing of the University, including services and maintenance of University premises.
- Construction of extensions and new premises.
- Salaries of SQU staff are above those of other higher education institutions in Oman.
- Provision of expensive extra-curricular activities and allocation of excessive promotion allowances to some of the administrative staff.

Generally speaking, it is recommended that the University administration reduce costs by admitting more students and limiting unnecessary expenditure.

4.5.5 SQU: The Future

Some objectives and the mechanisms for achieving them were highlighted in the annex of the five-year plan 2001–2005 on education and training, which was issued by the Ministry of National Economy. Some examples are as follows:

- Increasing the capacity of the University by admitting eleven thousand students up to the end of 2005.

- Extending working hours to include afternoon and evening classes.
- Offering distance learning, community education and correspondence courses.
- Introducing a nursing department within the College of Medicine.
- Recruiting more national teaching staff with a Ph.D. degree by increasing their proportion from 16 per cent to 43 per cent by the end of the plan in 2005.
- Admitting more students to the colleges of science and technology to meet the needs of the labour market.

The plan also tackled the World Bank proposal regarding the charging of fees to students for books, transport, catering and other personal expenses by granting them soft loans. Another proposal was to introduce post-graduate courses fully covered by students (Ministry of National Economy, 2000a: 15–23).

The charging of fees for higher education has become an international trend aimed at reducing public expenditure on this sector without reducing the number of students. In line with this trend, some countries have shown interest in private education and have charged higher fees at institutions of public education (Altbach, 1991: 227).

It will take longer for the imposition of fees to be accepted by Omani society. Nevertheless, people will continue financing their dependants, whether they are studying in Oman or abroad. This trend is supported by the fact that many Omanis pursue their university studies in other countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Egypt, Britain, the United States of America, and India.

4.5.6 SQU's Efficiency and Status: Local & International Evaluation

To evaluate the academic, technical and administrative progress of SQU, several surveys were conducted by external organizations. One example was that carried out

by UNESCO in 1991 after the graduation of the first intake of students. The results were submitted in a report which included a number of recommendations. Among these were the following (Kaddoura & others, 1991):

1. The appointment of a full-time University President.
2. Provision of computing facilities at a wider level.
3. The appointment of college deans in rotation.
4. Promotion and financial support of scientific research.
5. Support for the academic team of the University administration.
6. Attention to student counselling and explanation of its objectives to both staff and students.
7. Special attention to the College of Engineering and the improvement of its image by providing a consultancy service to local industry.
8. Establishment of a Career Service responsible for securing employment for graduates.
9. Increase in the number of Omani teaching staff.
10. Participation of teaching staff in all University issues without influencing their role in teaching, research and consultation.
11. Expansion of some of the University premises such as the libraries and the hostels.
12. Conducting a comprehensive evaluation five years after the present survey.

Clearly, many of the above recommendations are practical, and it is true that many of them were implemented following the UNESCO report. Below are some examples:

- A full-time President was appointed in May 2001. The new President is a member of the University academic staff and was formerly the University Under-Secretary.
- Computing facilities were upgraded by the end of the 1990s.
- Members of the teaching staff were selected and appointed as deans of colleges and centres, such as Student Affairs, Admission and Registration Scientific Research, the College of Arts, College of Medicine, College of Commerce and Economics and the College of Engineering. At a later stage, many of the University teaching staff participated in running a variety of the University's affairs.
- Sultan Qaboos made an annual donation for research. This was announced during his visit to the University in 2000. Furthermore, many private sector companies and ministries financed a number of researches. Other international institutions and organizations also participated in supporting research.

With regard to student counselling, it should be pointed out that the University is still looking for a suitable mechanism. The University in general, and the Admissions and Registration Department in particular, have faced numerous problems in this area. For example, many students selected and registered unsuitable courses and credit hours, which resulted in a situation that led to exposing some students to dismissal from the University. This situation was due to the inefficiency of the counselling system.

It is taken for granted that a university based on the credit-hour system should have an independent department with qualified staff who can run the system efficiently and advise students on selecting courses and registering their credit hours

according to their level and performance. It is understood that most Arab universities have problems in this area (al-Mutawwa', 1987: 235). SQU opened a student-counselling centre in 2000. However, it is run by only two members of the administration staff (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000b: 335), which means that it cannot achieve its aim. An effective university counselling service should guide students towards their future careers, but not pressure them into studying subjects against their wishes, as has happened at SQU.

The recommendation of the College of Engineering as a consulting body by UNESCO and the Council of Higher Education was approved by Sultan Qaboos. A Royal Decree 67/2000 was issued accrediting SQU as a consulting body to the public and private sectors' social and developmental projects (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000d: 38). By the end of the 1990s, SQU had established a careers office, which is run by four employees, to assist and guide the graduates in their future employment (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000b: 329).

Some of the University premises were extended, and extra classrooms and other service premises were built. The Sultan issued directives to construct a main library and a conference hall to accommodate more than 5,000 people.

A second evaluation of the University was carried out in 1998 by an external team comprising professors from Ireland, Switzerland and Sweden. The team put forward 43 main recommendations, covering both administration and financial management. Some of these recommendations are as follows:

- Ensuring the University's independence at both administrative and financial levels.
- Restructuring the University Council.

- Adding private revenues to the University's budget.

Other recommendations related to teaching and learning included:

- Extra attention to student academic counselling.
- Establishment of a career-orientation centre.
- Formation and financial support of more student societies.

There were also recommendations regarding research and public service (McBrierty, Strauch, Westling, Carroll, 1998: 74).

As a result of this report, the government implemented many of its recommendations. For example, the first Article of the University Law issued in 1999 stated that SQU was an institution of higher education and scientific research, and that it was independent at both financial and administrative levels (Sultan Qaboos University, 1999a: 1).

What does this administrative and financial independence mean? Can SQU be financially independent when it is totally financed by the government? Can SQU have administrative independence when the government determines its objectives and appoints its President? Does the public not have the right to know how the University budget, consisting of public money, is managed? What is the meaning of this independence if the government monitors all the University's financial and administrative affairs?

Before considering SQU's independence, it should be pointed out that there are various levels of university independence, such as research, education, administration, finance and identity. For this reason, it seems that the independence of such an institution is unattainable, for it is difficult to strike a balance between

satisfying the needs of society on the one hand, and the institution's internal requirements on the other (Alboronz, 1991: 242).

Generally speaking, the idea of University independence is subject to negotiation, for each party – the University on the one hand and the government or society on the other – has a different view. This situation is not confined to SQU, for it exists world-wide. In the Gulf States, the definition of university independence is not sufficiently clear, and can lead to misunderstanding between the government and the university. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the university to decide whether to be fully independent, or to attain academic freedom only (Riḍā, 1984: 246). However, it is not possible for any institution to be independent at the financial and administrative levels when we know that the government not only decides its objectives but also appoints its President and senior staff.

The government sees the University as a productive institution that is concerned with the dissemination of knowledge and information and the creation of qualified nationals who can participate in serving society and maintaining its independence and identity. If the University does not achieve these objectives, the government, supported by society, has the right to bring it back on track to meet the requirements. Furthermore, the government has the right to ensure that the national budget is spent in a way that guarantees a fair allocation to and careful expenditure by all state institutions including SQU. Therefore, the independence of the University in this area is not justified. It is an aim that is difficult to achieve, for if the University attained full independence, then it would be unlikely that its objectives would be realized.

The University should devote its attention to academic freedom, as represented by education and research. According to Riḍā (1984: 249), this means that the University functions freely and avoids political, religious and any other external pressure.

The University Council has been restructured five times:

1. 1994: the Council was chaired by the Minister of Higher Education, who also acted as the President of the University. Members comprised some ministers, the Under-Secretary and the Council Secretary (Royal Decree no. 2/94).
2. 1997: a new President was appointed, though the Minister of Higher Education remained as Chair of the Council.
3. 1998: the President chaired the Council, and the University was separated from the Ministry of Higher Education.
4. 1999: the position of Vice-President for Academic Affairs was abolished. This restructuring was contained in Royal Decree 14/99, forming the University Council chaired by the University President, with six members representing the private sector, the Vice-President and two Omani members of the academic staff appointed by the President every two years in rotation.
5. 2001: Royal Decree 54/2001 was issued, restructuring the University Council with the President as the Chair. The Council has the following members: Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Health, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of the Civil Service, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, the University Under-Secretary and two Omani members of the academic staff. Another four distinguished people have also been selected to represent the public and private sectors (Royal Decree no. 54/2001).

The continual changes in the University Council (five times in less than seven years) do not give an encouraging impression of the University's stability in recent times. The changes could be attributed to implementing the recommendations of some officials and foreign experts who did not have full knowledge of the University and local society. It is possible that there will be further structural and organizational changes at SQU so as to achieve stability and aim for an ideal model that will enable the University to attain its objectives.

It should be pointed out here that occupying the position of University President and Chair of the University Council at the same time is rare and exists only at SQU and Syrian universities (Sanqar, 2000: 68). The Chair of the University Council should be one of the leading figures of society. Otherwise he could be the Minister of Higher Education, as in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

One should also distinguish between the supreme University Council and the University Council / Academic Council. The former is usually a legislative body concerned with general policies, whereas the latter is an Executive Council and chaired by the University President. In Oman, there are examples of the first type, such as the Council of the Colleges of Education, which is chaired by the Minister of Higher Education, with the Under-Secretary, college deans, Director-General and other specialists as members. However, the Council of each college is headed by the college dean, with the heads of the academic departments as members. This also applies to the College of Shari'ah and Law, the Institute of Banking and the technical industrial colleges.

In line with the second evaluation team's recommendation that SQU should add private revenues to its budget, SQU began to collect fees for treatment at the University hospital and to keep the revenues for other services offered.

Despite this step, there is still disagreement between the University on the one hand and Ministry of National Economy and the Monetary Auditing Authority on the other. They have not reached agreement on the procedure to be followed by the University when charging for services. According to the authorities, the issue of special stamps by the University when charging fees is unusual. This procedure is subject to certain standards and specifications, and only one public authority should issue stamps to avoid any possible counterfeit. In addition, the public prefers to monitor the spending of public money, for, during the 1990s, many senior staff of public departments, including higher education, were arrested and sentenced for their misuse of public money (*al-Waṭan*, 2001: 3).

According to the assessment team recommendations, more student societies could be formed under Student Affairs.

A member of the assessment team, who was then appointed Vice-President for Educational Affairs, praised the assessment in one of his open lectures, in which he discussed the readiness of SQU to enter the twenty-first century. He pointed out that many of the recommendations in the report had been included in four Royal Decrees and the introduction of a new structure based on flexibility (McBrierty, 1999: 28).

Nevertheless, it is also true that it was not until the government had implemented many of the recommendations that it discovered mistakes in many of the procedures followed. This situation resulted in replacing the above-mentioned

decrees with new ones, according to which a new President was appointed, the organizational structure was modified, the Board was restructured and the Rules and Regulations were amended.

In 2000, a third assessment of SQU was carried out by the World Bank as part of a comprehensive survey of education in Oman. This survey praised University practices such as introducing more courses while maintaining the quality of education. This has enabled correspondence courses to be made available and the use of the University's educational technology to be extended. The World Bank study also pointed out that the University could accommodate about eleven thousand students daily throughout the working hours of 8.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. by using the newly added classrooms. The number could be increased by 50 per cent if the working hours were extended to 8.00 p.m. (World Bank, 2000: 14).

Another issue addressed in the World Bank report was the high cost of the SQU student, currently 7,513 Omani Riyals (US\$19,534). This was four times as high as the cost of a student at teacher-training colleges, currently 1,795 Omani Riyals (US\$4,667) (World Bank, 2000: 20). The problem was discussed earlier in this chapter.

4.5.7 Academic and Administrative Conflict at SQU

To understand the background to this conflict, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the structure of the University staff. According to the 2000 statistics, there were 626 members of the academic staff, of whom 261 were Omani (41.7 per cent) (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000b: 73). There were also 1,079 members of the administrative and technical staff in 1999, of whom 865 were Omani (80.2 per cent) (Sultan Qaboos University, 1999, p. 17). The University hospital staff comprised

1,228, of whom 500 were Omani (40.7 per cent) (Sultan Qaboos University, 2000b: 356).

Such diversity among the University staff members – administrative/academic, Omani/non-Omani – in addition to the doctors, technicians and service staff, created on the one hand a co-operative community where experiences could be exchanged, but on the other hand it caused competition among staff between serving the University and satisfying individual interests. Sometimes, the competition erupted into open conflict between different categories of staff, or even between staff of the same category. The unsettled organization at the University in recent years has been evidence of this conflict.

The SQU academic staff is made up of two main groups, the first of which is the Omani teaching staff whose university experience is still fresh. This group is divided into two sub-categories. One comprises those young staff who graduated from SQU and returned as employees after completing their higher studies abroad. Members of this sub-category believe that they have the right to be the leaders, for they had been students at the University and are familiar with all its issues. The other sub-category consists of the older Omani staff who used to hold positions in other institutions and then joined SQU later on.

Although some members of the second sub-category lack the educational background, they assert that they are better fitted than the other staff for educational management owing to their extensive experience outside the University. They believe that they have the ability to invest this experience in linking the University with other sectors of the community to create a more efficient network.

The Omani academic staff could also be divided into three sub-groups according to their beliefs and personal attitudes. The members of one group an idealistic approach to education, which they might have acquired during their studies abroad. They believe in this without considering the local political, economic, social and cultural environment. Members of the second group forsaking their academic cares sought administrative positions as heads of departments or deans of colleges, or even senior administrative positions within and outside the University. This, of course, affected their scientific and research mission. The third group tried to avoid such negative attitudes, or to have the advantages of both the first and second groups.

The second category of the academic staff comprises expatriate members of the teaching staff, who are of forty different nationalities (al-Saadi, 1997: 202). These could also be divided into two sub-groups: non-Arabs, who, although constituting a minority, have the influence and authority of decision-makers; and the Arabs, who are also divided according to their nationality, that is, Egyptian, Jordanian, Sudanese, Moroccan, etc. Even among the Jordanians, there are some who are purely Jordanian and others who were originally Palestinian. In many cases, personal conflict erupted among the members of these groups to the extent that the University administration was obliged to terminate their contracts (Personal Communication from SQU Source).

Further conflict arose between the administrative and academic staff in the mid-1990s. It is said that Omani and expatriate academic staff were behind the decision to replace the previous University administration in 1997, after student protests. The academic staff wanted to seize power and take control of the University administration. That was why the newly appointed University administration that

took over in the same year tried to include the academic staff in planning and decision-making, whether as committee conveners, consultants or members of the University Board. Simultaneously, the administrative staff took control by establishing new general directorates, run by administrative staff, to supervise all University affairs(Personal Communication from SQU Source).

In their positions of leaders, the academic staff retained their control in 2001. In 2002 they have been “under probation” to see if they can run the University successfully, bearing in mind their previous conflicts. Now they have the opportunity to prove themselves.

It should be emphasized that such conflicts are not confined to SQU, for they occur at universities throughout the world. Some scholars have discussed the effects of this problem at the Gulf universities (al-Najjār, 1992: 86). In Egypt, for example, a member of the teaching staff considers a University post to be a transitional stage on the road to a senior government appointment (Ammār, 1997: 129).

4.5.8 Student Protest at SQU in 1997

Students have played a pivotal role in the political and cultural history of many countries. They have been central players in the independence movements that have brought freedom to many developing countries. Campus social and political movements have been harbingers of change in many societies. Yet not all student movements signal impending social crises, and they are by no means always successful (Altbach, 1999).

It is taken for granted that besides the provision of educational, training and research facilities at a university, critical thinking is considered a major and essential aspect of any course. The university is the place where people can express

themselves freely. However, this freedom occasionally creates conflict with the authorities, for governments that support students financially do not take kindly to student protest (Husen, 1991: 216–217).

In the 1990s, SQU students and, to some extent, members of the teaching staff began discussing many topics that had previously been prohibited. The students and then all sectors of society, organized demonstrations to express their support for some regional issues such as the Palestinian Intifada and the American war on Iraq. The University students and staff also contributed by writing articles about some issues of importance to society. The debate was published in the local press and on the Internet pages, mainly through the Omania Net, called “Arab Sabla”.

The most significant incident was the student protest during the summer of 1997, which resulted in the replacement of the University President. A new administration took over, but was again replaced in 2001. It was said that academic problems were the reason for the protest. The leaders of the protest were exposed to dismissal from the University because of the repeated academic warnings. They were not happy with the minimum grade point average, which is 2 (Omania Net, 2001). There were also complaints about the hostel and its strict rules, catering, transport and entertainment facilities (SQU President’s Office, 1998).

The academic team members who assessed the University after the protest concluded that one of the reasons was the students’ misunderstanding of the grading system and the evaluation of the grade point average. Another reason was their feeling of being neglected and ignored and being denied the opportunity to express themselves (McBrierty, Strauch, Westling, Carroll, 1998: 74).

The new University administration established many procedures to absorb the students' enthusiasm and anger and to avoid further protest. One recommendation was to construct a comprehensive entertainment centre and to give students a maintenance grant instead of requiring them to live in the University hostel. Another recommendation was that the University should continue applying the current academic system to guarantee international recognition, although some modifications could be made to the evaluation of students' grades (SQU President's Office, 1998a).

If SQU students' demands during their demonstrations in 1997 are compared with those of students taking part in demonstrations at universities elsewhere at that time, it can be seen that they were not extreme. The demands simply consisted of the provision of entertainment facilities and a reduction in the academic load. For example, during their protest in 1997, German students were demanding improvements in state education, a reduction in the gap between social classes, provision of employment for the unemployed, and an increase in the state financial support provided for students (McCathie, 1998: 23). Although students in Indonesia effected the overthrow of the Indonesian President in 1998, their problems were not solved. On the contrary, their conditions gradually deteriorated. Their demands were a reduction in tuition fees and book prices (Sukarsono, 1998: 23).

It should be pointed out that the conditions of SQU students are far better than those of their counterparts in many other countries. They receive totally free education, they are provided with accommodation, catering facilities and transport, and to a large extent, their future employment is almost secured, especially for graduates in medicine, engineering and education.

4.5.9 Coeducation at SQU

As stated in Chapter 3, the University has been coeducational since its opening in 1986. At the beginning, the system was well controlled by certain rules and conditions. It paved the way for conservative Omani society to accept the role of women and their participation in education and employment alongside men.

After the 1997 protest, in which students requested more entertainment facilities and functions, the number of students' societies increased, and this was accompanied by new activities and practices such as the following:

- There were more entertainment functions, including concerts, plays and traditional dancing, in which both male and female students took part.
- Both male and female students broke the rules of using only the routes allocated to each sex.
- Activities rooms and computer laboratories were now used by both male and female students at the same time.

These changes have made a strong impact both inside and outside the University, forming two extreme views. Some people have supported the changes. However, others have fiercely opposed them, pointing out that the activities conflict with the society's traditions and values, and that they are the beginning of the University's road to ruin (Omania Net, 2001a).

Some people think that this new practice, together with its tacit acceptance by the authorities, aims at creating a liberal opinion to oppose the strong Islamic opinion that appeared in the 1990s. On the other hand, the new movement is a trial step to disunite several sectarian parties within the campus and to end their verbal conflicts. However, these parties are likely to unite to face the new and undesirable changes.

Other people think that this is a step towards the environment that will exist at the private universities, which are due to open in some of the regions in the near future. The new universities, with their limited capital, cannot afford separate premises for male and female students. It must also be borne in mind that the new universities will open in the regions where the people are more conservative than in the capital. Therefore, the conclusion is that the new practices at SQU will be a model for the new universities, for it has instigated coeducation and prepared Omani society to accept it.

Whether the above assumptions are true or false, the new trend is considered a normal development of the Omani experience in women's rights. Omani women enjoy the same privileges as men in many areas such as education and employment. There are female Members of Parliament, as well as female members of the State Council, Business People's Council and the Omani Chamber of Commerce and Industry. In February 20, 2003 the Sultan appointed first woman minister for the Public Authority for Craft Industries. Other Omani women have achieved senior government positions in ministries and embassies. This trend of granting women their rights might cause misunderstanding between the Sultanate and some conservative neighbouring countries where women are demanding their rights, from participation in politics to obtaining permission to drive vehicles. Nevertheless, Oman is determined to forge ahead in its aim to achieve equality so as to adapt fully to the globalization of the twenty-first century.

4.6 Teacher-Training Colleges

In Chapter 3 it was stated that the intermediate teacher-training colleges were introduced after the teacher-training institutes were closed down in 1984/85. At first

there were only two colleges, although the number rose to nine in 1992. The course lasts two years and aims at producing teachers qualified for employment in primary schools. Between 1991 and 1997 these colleges produced 7,686 graduate teachers, of whom 4,112 were male. Details are given in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10 Graduates of teacher-training colleges: 1991–1997

Year	Male	Female	Female as % of total	Total
1991	511	407	44.3	918
1992	694	579	45.5	1,273
1993	840	615	42.3	1,455
1994	816	694	46.0	1,510
1995	790	746	48.6	1,536
1996	458	530	53.7	988
1997	3	3	50.0	6
Total	4,112	3,574	46.5	7,686

Source: “Report on the Number of Teacher-Training College Graduates between 1985/86 and 1995/96”, Ministry of Higher Education, Muscat, 2000.

The table shows that female graduates constituted 53.7 per cent of the total number in 1996. This is attributed to the admissions policy that assesses applicants according to their grades in the Secondary School Certificate, regardless of sex. Nevertheless, this policy was changed at a later stage. The table also shows that there were only six graduates in 1997. These were students from the final intake, who had failed to graduate in 1996.

Although the state school population rose to 490,482 in 1995/96, an increase of 25.2 per cent since 1991, and the target of producing sufficient Omanis qualified to teach in intermediate and secondary schools was reached in the mid-1990s, the proportion of Omani teachers had not exceeded 53.5 per cent by the end of 1995 (Ministry of Education, 2000: 19).

Consequently, the Ministry of Education reviewed the status of the colleges and requested experts to explore suitable ways of improving their performance. After

a lengthy study, it was decided to upgrade the intermediate colleges to university level and offer a four-year course leading to a Bachelor degree. The role of these colleges would now be to train teachers for all three stages of school education: primary, intermediate and secondary. The new course was introduced in 1994 at two colleges in Nizwa and Rustaq, two major cities in Oman.

Later, Royal Decree 42/95 was issued, affiliating the colleges to the Ministry of Higher Education. Consequently, another four colleges were upgraded and the two colleges in Muscat were closed down (al-Manthri, 2000: 10). This was because SQU, which is in Muscat, includes a college of education, and the government wished to extend teacher-training to other cities in the country.

In 1995, another Royal Decree 79/95 was issued, detailing the bylaws and objectives of the colleges as well as the formation of the Board and its authority. The Decree also established the Academic Council and the organizational structure of each college (Royal Decree no. 79/95). Then Ministerial Decree 8/96 was issued to form the Executive Board of the main system of the teacher-training colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 1996).

The aims of the current system of the teacher-training colleges are as follows:

- Omanizing the teaching staff at all three stages of school education.
- Training teachers with a comprehensive and unified approach at educational, professional and cultural levels, so as to produce competent individuals who can perform their duties efficiently (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000e).

4.6.1 Courses Offered at Teacher-Training Colleges

The General Directorate of Teacher-Training Colleges runs six colleges located in cities around the country. The colleges offer a range of courses that are open to both

men and women. Two of the colleges are for men (Suhar and Nizwa), two are for women (Rustaq & Ibri), and two are coeducational (Sur and Salalah) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000f: 9–10). There are two main types of courses. One is the BA degree course in Arabic, English, Islamic Studies, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics. The other is the Diploma in Education, which is designed to train university graduates in literary or scientific subjects, whether from SQU or other universities, for employment as teachers (al-Busaidi & Bashir, 1997: 176–177).

The colleges began to offer the Bachelor degree course in Education from 1995/96 to train teachers for the second stage of basic education, that is, Grades 5–12. In 1998/99, a training course for teachers of the first stage of basic education (Grades 1–4) was added (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999d). Second-stage teachers were trained before those of the first stage because there were more Omani teachers at primary level than at intermediate and secondary levels.

The teacher-training courses available appear to be on the same level as those in other countries. For example, France developed teacher-training courses in 1991 to bridge the gap between primary and secondary school teachers. The courses are also designed to link the theoretical and practical aspects of the basic teacher training. Therefore, it became essential for primary school teachers to have a university degree to enable them to teach pupils at this stage (Foster, 2000: 16).

4.6.2 Terms and Conditions of Admission

The following conditions should be met by applicants for admission to teacher-training colleges (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000f: 3–4):

- The applicant should be an Omani national.

- The applicant should be the holder of a recent Secondary School Certificate with a grade of not less than 75 per cent.
- The applicant should be under 25.
- The applicant should be healthy and fit for teaching.

Admission is based on the applicants' school grades. Priority is given to those with the highest grades and male and female students are selected according to the number of each that is required. The fourth condition of admission was added to the list after a few graduates of the intermediate colleges had difficulty in finding employment because they had physical disabilities, mainly affecting their limbs and eyesight. Only a limited number of applicants can be admitted, which means that the proportions of men and women are set annually. This is considered essential if admission is based on only the secondary school grades. Otherwise, most of the applicants accepted would be female, for the girls usually achieve higher grades than the boys. Consequently, the Ministries of Education and Higher Education raised the minimum grade for girls to avoid admitting more girls than boys. Sometimes, it was set as high as 90 per cent. Nevertheless, the proportion of female applicants admitted to the teacher-training colleges rose to 51 per cent between 1994 and 2000 (Ministry of National Economy, 2000: 3).

4.6.3 Number of Admissions

Between 1994/95 and 2002/03 the teacher-training colleges admitted 17,042 applicants. Table 4.11 shows that the number of students admitted had increased annually, reaching 2,523 in 1998/99. In that year, the Ministry of Higher Education expanded the capacity of each college to accommodate 500 students, though only for one year, owing to the rising demand for higher education. Consequently, the

Cabinet recommended admitting more students to the institutions of higher education. In 2002/03 the number of admissions fell to 1,871, for the Ministry of Education had trained sufficient teachers.

Table 4.11 No. of admissions to teacher-training colleges: 1994/95–2002/03

Academic Year	No. of admissions		
	Male	Female	Total
1994/95	340	245	585
1995/96	943	763	1,706
1996/97	1,237	868	2,105
1997/98	1,349	833	2,182
1998/99	1,348	1,175	2,523
1999/00	711	1,294	2,005
2000/01	723	1,263	1,986
2001/02	784	1,295	2,079
2002/03	1,012	859	1,871
Total	8,447	8,595	17,042

Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Higher Education, 2003.

4.6.4 Bachelor Degree Courses

There were five batches of graduates following the conversion of the teacher-training colleges into University Colleges. In 2002, 8,566 students graduated from these Colleges, of whom 45.7 were female, as shown in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Teacher-training colleges: Bachelor degree graduates 1998–2002

Year	Graduates				
	Female	%	Male	%	Total
1998	241	43.8	309	56.2	550
1999	734	47.6	808	52.4	1,542
2000	847	44	1,079	55.3	1,926
2001	832	41	1,194	59	2,026
2002	1,259	49.9	1,263	50.1	2,522
Total	3,913	45.7	4,653	54.3	8,566

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, Muscat, 2003.

Although the number of teachers graduating has increased annually, employment is readily available for them, whereas arts and sciences graduates face difficulties in finding suitable posts. The Ministry of the Civil Service records show that the majority of the university graduates during the 1990s were recruited by the Ministry of Education. This is attributed to the conversion of the intermediate colleges into University Colleges, the addition of more premises and courses, and generally increasing the Colleges' capacity. The Ministry of Education recruited 75.8 per cent of the graduates in 1998, most of whom had been students at SQU's College of Education or the teacher-training colleges under the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry of the Civil Service, 2000: 9–13).

In 2000, there were 24,881 teachers employed in Omani state schools, of whom 12,581 were female, a proportion of 50.6 per cent (Ministry of Education, 2000: 32). It is noticeable that more women are training as teachers. This profession is preferred by Omani society, for teachers do not have to travel far from home. It could be said that this is an international phenomenon, for most of the teachers around the world are women, except in some regions such as South Asia, parts of Africa and the Arab countries (Avalos, 2000: 461). It is expected that their numbers will rise, especially after the Ministry of Education's decision to employ female teachers for the first four grades of basic education.

4.6.5 Student–Teaching Staff Ratio & the Cost of a College Student

The average annual cost of a student at a teacher-training college is 1,795 Omani Riyals (US\$4,667), which is the lowest among the state institutions of higher education in the country. In 2000, there were 8,720 registered student teachers and

516 teaching staff (Ministry of Higher Education, 2000g: 16), thus the student-teaching staff ratio is approximately 17:1.

4.6.6 Omanization Scheme at the Teacher-Training Colleges

The Omanization of the academic staff is still far behind schedule, for the proportion of Omani lecturers was only 7.6 per cent in 2000. However, this is not true of the academic support staff, which is 100 per cent Omani (al-Manthri, 2000: 15). The Omanization of the teaching staff could take a long time, for scholarships for postgraduate courses are allocated by the Ministry of the Civil Service, which also allocates scholarships to all the state institutions. There are only eighty scholarships available for all the ministries and public departments, whereas SQU, for example, is independent and can offer the same number of scholarships for postgraduate courses.

4.6.7 Assessment of Teacher-Training Colleges

Since the 1990s, the authorities have shown great interest in evaluating the performance of these colleges and measuring the professional ability of their graduates so as to create the best training mechanism. Consequently, the Ministry of Education requested an assessment to be made of the current and future roles of the intermediate teacher-training colleges. The assessment was conducted by Razik and his colleagues, after which the intermediate teacher-training colleges were upgraded to University Colleges (Razik & others, 1994).

In 1999, the Ministry of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and SQU, carried out a survey of the performance of newly graduated teachers. The result was dissatisfaction with their performance in the classroom, especially teachers of mathematics, who were rated lower than those of other subjects. As a result, the committee concerned recommended holding workshops and

in-service training courses to improve the teachers' professional skills, and to follow up with an interim assessment of the graduates (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999e: 70).

In collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, the Ministry of Higher Education commenced two studies in 2000: one of the future roles of the colleges, and the other of quality assurance. The Ministry has plans to introduce further courses in some colleges to meet the demands of the local labour market (al-Bandarī, 2001). The study of quality assurance was in agreement with the educational action plan of the Gulf States, which aimed at improving the professional competency of teachers by being in contact with the latest developments in education. It also emphasized acquiring the basic experience that enables teachers to contribute effectively by assessing and applying these developments. The action plan recommended implementing these aims by conducting studies in collaboration with specialized organizations experienced in upgrading the teachers' effectiveness and capable of creating in-service training courses (Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States, 2000).

The Ministry of Higher Education chose the University of Edinburgh to take on the project because it is recognized internationally as an institution of good repute and because it has extensive experience in this field. The assessment team comprised academic experts from the Department of Education and Society and the Department of Educational Theory and Practice.

4.7 Teacher-Training Institute

In 1991 the Ministry of Education established the Teacher-Training Institute, which offered a one-year course leading to a Diploma of Teacher-Training, equal to 33 credit hours. The reasons for establishing this Institute were as follows:

- The increasing demand for employment as schoolteachers by SQU graduates of both the arts and sciences colleges, and also by graduates of non-education colleges of other international universities.
- Preference shown by female graduates for pursuing teacher-training inside Oman.
- Implementing the policy of Omanizing the teaching profession, that is, appointing Omani staff to replace the expatriate teachers.

Although the Ministry planned to admit 240 trainees annually, the first year's intake was only 59 applicants (Isan, 1995: 129–138). The reason was that many graduates of non-educational courses at that time could find employment in the government sector without having to spend an extra year undergoing educational training. In addition, some of the graduates did not even wish to pursue a career in teaching. The low number of applicants persuaded the Ministry to close the Institute in 1994/95 (al-Manthri, 1992: 22). This turned out to be a wise decision, for the Ministry discovered its mistake in establishing the Institute at an early stage. It would have been better if teacher-training had been included as part of the courses at the College of Education (SQU) and other teacher-training colleges established in different regions, for that would have unified efforts and teacher-training resources and reduced the cost.

4.8 Technical Education in Oman

Technical education is an integral part of the whole educational system. It is urgently needed so as to train Omanis to the level necessary to replace the dominant expatriate labour force. Despite this need, technical education has not yet attained stability. In order to achieve its goals and to develop smoothly, technical education should be based on sensible planning that considers all the relevant issues and identifies its current status.

Clearly, this sector has faced many obstacles and has not been given the necessary attention and assessment, whether before or after the introduction of its courses. Therefore, a range of courses were introduced and withdrawn within a short period and before checking the results. There seemed to be no clear national strategy to specify the role of technical education in serving society. Furthermore, there was no relevant follow-up procedure to assess its intake or rate the effectiveness and relevance of the recruitment plans to its output. Although many students completed their studies in this sector in the 1990s, they have still not found employment.

During the 1990s there were accelerated changes in the organization and courses of technical education. In 1991 Royal Decree 115/91 was issued, establishing the Vocational Training Authority (VTA) that was to run the technical industrial colleges and the state and private institutions of vocational training. A member of the senior staff, formerly an Under-Secretary of another ministry, headed this Authority. The Management Council comprised the Minister of the Civil Service as the Chair, with the VTA President, Under-Secretary of Labour, Under-Secretary of the Civil Service, representative of the Ministry of Finance and Economics and

a representative of the Omani Chamber of Commerce and Industry as members (Vocational Training Authority, 1995: 10–11).

Before the end of the 1990s, the VTA was closed down and technical education was entrusted to the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training. It was said that the VTA failed to implement policies and plans concerning technical education. Although many private training institutes were established, they did not function well because the VTA did not monitor and follow up their work, despite the fact that the VTA had contributed to their capital to assist in training Omani youth. By the end of 2001, the Ministry was divided into two ministries: the Ministry of the Labour Force and the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The first technical college was established in 1984 as the pioneer in this field in Oman. It was called the Oman Technical Industrial College. Then in 1994 it was renamed the Muscat Technical Industrial College, after four institutes of vocational training in the regional cities of Salalah, Nizwa, Ibra and Musana had been upgraded to technical colleges in the same year. From the year of its establishment to 1995, Muscat College produced a total of 1,760 graduates, of whom 1,103 were male and 657 were female.

The General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) was introduced in Muscat College as a pilot course, then in the regional colleges in the following year (Vocational Training Authority, 1995: 15–18).

The GNVQ is a British qualification that aims to equip students with vocational skills with which they can be employed in a wide range of technical and vocational fields in the labour market with the minimum of supervision (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, 1999). The new system did not last

long, for both students and employers were dissatisfied with it. There were debates in Parliament by MPs who believed that the system was irrelevant to the needs of Omani students and the local labour market. This view was supported by the results of a study conducted by the Higher Education Council in 2001. The study highlighted the high cost of the courses. In addition, it concluded that the system was not applied in the same way as in the United Kingdom, where students aged between 16 and 18 join the courses to prepare them for technical education. In Oman, on the other hand, students join the courses after they have completed their secondary education, and then they study for three years. The first year is for improving their English language, the second and third years for working towards the vocational qualifications (Ministry of Higher Education, 2001d).

Another study pointed out that the GNVQ courses were studied only at the level of theory owing to the lack of sufficient workshops and laboratories, and in some cases, none of these was available at all. The study recommended that the authorities review the system and devise a suitable curriculum with the emphasis on technical subjects. It also suggested allocating enough finance to introduce new technology and provide practical training at industrial and commercial institutions (Dhaḥāwī & ʿĪsān, 1997: 28).

As a result, the Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training established the Oman National Diploma (OND) alongside the GNVQ in 1999/2000. The new system is based on intensive theoretical courses and practical training in workshops and laboratories with English as the language of instruction. To help the students understand their specialized courses, English for Specific Purposes is

introduced during the English Foundation Course (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, 1999: 4).

Since the OND is a modified version of the GNVQ, it did not improve the quality of technical education. So another, more recent, step has been taken. In 2001 Muscat College was upgraded to a Technical University awarding a BSc degree in a range of technical subjects. Depending on the capacity of the College, the best students from all the technical colleges are eligible for entry to its courses, according to the results of their final examination in the English Language course, which is offered in the first year at all the technical colleges.

It is noticeable, therefore, that technical education has been subject to continual experimentation, and it seems that it will take some time before its long-term objectives are specified and a level of stability is achieved. This target will not be reached unless a thorough study is made of all the issues of technical education and its links with the real need for a skilled and semi-skilled labour force in both the public and private sectors. In addition, it should benefit from the experience of developed countries in this field.

Technical education should be linked with technological developments and the trend in globalization so as to enable Omani students to face the challenges of the twenty-first century, for which they need clear vision, strong leadership and practical training. The development of appropriate technical education and training should be based on producing personnel for relevant employment as well as small individual projects. It should also include training in the management of small projects that can contribute to the country's economy. This is considered a priority, for suitable posts will not be available for many trainees. According to estimates of future needs, it is

expected that 50 per cent of graduates around the world will be unable to find employment (Power, 1999: 29–36).

It is disappointing to see that a high proportion of technical education graduates are unemployed owing to the lack of sensible planning in this area. If the relevant authorities had learnt from the experience of other countries, many problems could have been avoided. One problem, in particular, is the mismatching of training and employment. When a trainee does not practise the skills acquired, training is considered a negative investment and it will be more expensive than education (Castro, 1999: 37–54). Financing technical education and training should be conditional on providing employment opportunities for the trainees. Otherwise, high expenditure on this type of education is a waste of public money, as has happened in Oman.

Although the private sector has the most employment opportunities for the technical education output, most of the posts are occupied by expatriates. Therefore, this sector should take part in the provision of employment for Omanis, especially in financing, planning and assessment. It should share the responsibility and participate in training the national labour force, particularly since it benefits from privileges granted by the government such as soft loans and tax-free business.

In this context it should be stated that problems in technical education are not confined to Oman but exist also in most industrial countries. As a result, Australia, France, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States have carried out a comprehensive reform of their technical education system during the 1990s (Atchoarena & Caillods, 1999: 67–87).

In the Arab World, the Sixth Annual Meeting of Higher Education and Research Ministers, which was held in Algeria in 1996, recommended giving particular attention to technical education and classifying it among the educational priorities and strategies of the Arab countries. There was also emphasis on the reform of this vital type of education and the importance of including all the production and employment sectors in designing and developing appropriate courses (ALECSO, 1996: 12).

4.8.1 Growth of Admissions & Graduations: Technical Industrial Colleges

As mentioned above, four regional vocational training centres were upgraded to technical colleges and began admitting secondary school leavers from 1994. The number of admissions has gradually increased to a total of 3,344 in 2002, as shown in Table 4.13.

The total number of admissions to all five colleges up to 2002 was 18,287. The proportion of female students reached only 37.5 per cent by the end of 2002. This low percentage of female students was because the government limited their number, for most of them take courses in business and scientific subjects. Another reason is that women are barred from some areas of employment, which are restricted to men owing to traditions and religious customs. These restrictions are expected to disappear in the future as people gradually change their attitude owing to

Table 4.13 No. of admissions to 5 technical industrial colleges:
1994–2002

Academic Year	No. of admissions			
	Male	Female	Female as % of total	Total
1994	492	201	29.0	693
1995	1,092	439	28.7	1,531
1996	1,178	523	30.7	1,701
1997	1,108	570	34.0	1,678
1998	1,410	545	27.9	1,955
1999	1,479	517	25.9	1,996
2000	1,344	744	35.6	2,088
2001	1,097	2,204	66.8	3,301
2002	2,235	1,109	33.2	3,344
Total	11,435	6,852	37.5	18,287

Source: Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, 1999, Ministry of Manpower, 2002 & Ministry of Higher Education, 2002, Muscat.

their increasing understanding of cultures and values in other parts of the world. One example of this change in attitude is that the authorities permitted an Omani woman to be a taxi driver.

4.9 Technical College of the Oman Royal Guard

The course of study at this college consists of four stages: fifth and sixth elementary, followed by intermediate, secondary and diploma. The college admits state school pupils who have successfully completed the fourth elementary grade, from which they can progress to the diploma course after completing the technical secondary stage. To obtain a diploma, students need to complete ten GNVQ advanced units. It is clear that the number of students at this college is limited, for there were only 27 graduates between 1999 and 2000 (Oman Royal Guard, 1999), and the total of the applicants accepted in 2001 was 33 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002). The low

number of students and graduates is due to the fact that the college courses cater only for the needs of the Oman Royal Guard, rather than for all society's institutions.

4.10 Health Education

The 1980s witnessed only a limited progress in the health education programmes because this type of training was available in just two national institutions: the College of Medicine at Sultan Qaboos University, and the Institute of Health, which is run by the Ministry of Health, in Muscat. Nevertheless, health education was widely extended to other areas of Oman to cope with the increase in population and the need for more graduates to work in this field. Therefore, five institutes of nursing were established in Sohar, Nizwa, Sur, Ibri and Salalah in 1991, as well as the Oman Institute of Public Health and the Oman Institute of Pharmacy Assistants in Muscat. In 1993 the Ministry of Health opened two institutes of nursing in Muscat and Ibra, and a third in Rustaq a year later. Further institutes of nursing were established in al-Batina North and al-Dhahra in 1996, followed by the Interior Region in 1997.

These institutes offered a variety of courses including Nursing, Laboratory Science, Rehabilitation, X-Ray, Dental Nurse, Pharmacy Assistant, Public Health Inspection, Health Awareness and Nutrition Supervision. However, the last three courses were suspended in 1998. The period of study ranges from two and a half to three and a half years according to the content of the course. Besides theoretical instruction, through the medium of English, students receive practical training in the state hospitals (Ministry of Health, 1998: 5).

It should be pointed out that establishing a variety of health institutes throughout Oman has played an important role in admitting and training more secondary school leavers for future employment in the hospitals. These members of

the hospital staff have contributed to the public service and raised the level of health awareness in society. Graduate nationals have played a particularly important part in facilitating communication between the Omani patients referred to the clinics and hospitals and the non-Arabic-speaking expatriate staff. Table 4.14 shows the number of graduates from the College of Medicine (SQU) and the Institutes of Health Sciences run by the Ministry of Health.

4.10.1 Institutes of Health: Admissions Policy

The Institutes of Health Sciences admit holders of the Secondary School Certificate, with a specialization in science subjects, after a test in English and a personal interview. Each of the ten regional Institutes admits 35 applicants annually (Ministry of Health, 1998a). This number does not meet the country's need for Omani nurses, who comprised only 26 per cent of Oman's nursing staff in 2000. Health sector planners would like to increase this proportion to between 62 and 71 per cent by the year 2006 (Ministry of National Economy, 2000: 19). This target is applicable only to state health institutions, for the health institutions in the private sector rarely employ Omani staff. Table 4.15 shows the number of students enrolled in health institutes in 2000.

Table 4.14 No. of graduates from the College of Medicine (SQU) & the Institutes of Health Sciences (1992-2001)

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	Total
College of Medicine	–	44	39	45	55	67	68	82	63	90	553
Institutes of Health Sciences	100	169	308	365	490	437	439	511	612	-	3,498
Total	100	213	347	410	545	504	507	593	675	90	4,051

Source: Ministry of Health, 2001 & SQU, 2002, Muscat.

Table 4.15 Number of students enrolled in health institutes in 2000*

Institute	Male	Female	Total
Health Science Institute	37	37	74
Oman Assistant Pharmacy Institute	25	31	56
Oman Nursing Institute	5	97	102
Muscat Nursing Institute	8	85	93
Salalah Nursing Institute	14	23	37
Al-Dhakhliyah Nursing Institute	2	33	35
Nizwa Nursing Institute	0	36	36
Ibra Nursing Institute	2	35	37
Sur Nursing Institute	0	35	35
North Al Batinah Nursing Institute	0	36	36
Sohar Nursing Institute	0	37	37
Al-Rustaq Nursing Institute	1	35	36
Al-Dhahirah Nursing Institute	5	30	35
Ibri Nursing Institute	3	32	35
Total	102	582	684

*The number of students enrolled in health institutes in the academic year 2002/03 was 694, of 87.8% were female.

Source: Ministry of Health, 2002, Muscat.

4.10.2 Private Health Education

The role of the private sector in health and medical training began in the academic year 2001/02, when the first private medical college opened its doors to 100 applicants, who were to study medicine for seven years. The college provides

theoretical training in Muscat, with clinical and practical training in the following year at the hospital in Sohar, a major town to the north of the capital (al-Manthri, 2000).

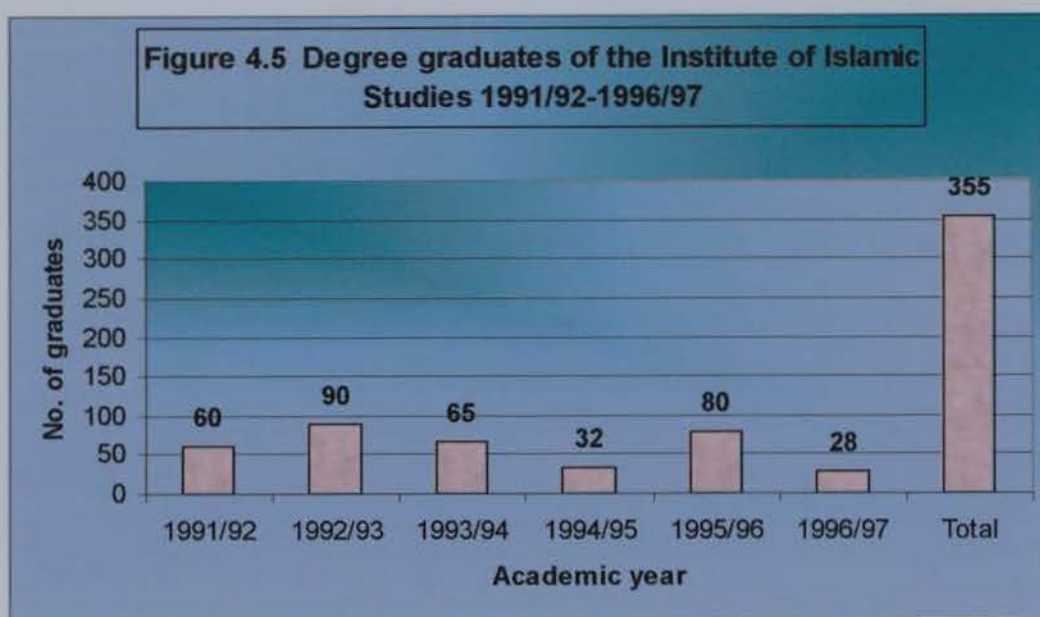
4.11 Institutes of Islamic Studies

Towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s the Omani government established the Sultan Qaboos Institutes of Islamic Studies in various towns around the country, including Sohar, Ja‘lan, Salalah, Khasab and Muscat. Their goal was to train students in Islamic culture for employment as preachers or in government departments according to their area of study (Diwan of Royal Court, 1997). In 1992 Royal Decree 50/92 was issued to establish the Management Board, headed by the Grand Mufti of Oman, with a membership of the representatives of the Royal Court – the sponsor of the Institutes – as well as SQU, the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and the Ministry of Education. The Board is responsible for drawing up the general policies regarding academic affairs and the curriculum (Royal Decree no. 50/92). Prior to opening the College of Shari‘ah and Law in 1997, the government closed the two Institutes of Islamic Studies in Sohar and Salalah. The other Institutes continued to offer courses at the secondary level only, though previously a graduate study course had been available (Assistant to the Secretary-General of Sultan Qaboos, Centre for Islamic Culture, 2001).

It could be said that the instability caused by the opening and closing of institutes of education within a short time is clear evidence of the uncertainty in education policies in Oman. The situation could be attributed to the fact that responsibility is entrusted to a variety of public bodies. The resulting contradictions and disagreements over policies have produced instability in higher education in

Oman. An example of this situation is the different policies of teacher-training in the country. The colleges of education that are supervised by the Ministry of Higher Education follow one system, whereas the College of Education at SQU follow another. Another example is the implementation of different policies for the Islamic Studies courses at (1) the College of Shari'ah under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education; (2) the Institute of Islamic Studies under the supervision of the Diwan of Royal Court; and (3) the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs.

Between the establishment of the Institutes of Islamic Studies and 1996/97, there graduated six batches of students, totalling 355 males, as shown in Figure 4.5



Source: Diwan of Royal Court, Muscat, 1997.

4.12 Sultan Qaboos Academy for Police Studies

Besides the Military Forces College of Leadership and General Staff, mentioned in Chapter 3 and the Technical College of the Oman Royal Guard, a third college for police studies was established in Nizwa, a major town in the Interior Region. This

college has been upgraded to university level, awarding a diploma and BSc degree in police studies and law. It provides both theoretical and practical training to enable students to qualify as police officers. In addition, there are diploma and postgraduate courses in law and police studies. The college plays an important role in scientific research and studies (Royal Decree no. 62/2000).

The Academy for Police Studies admits Omani staff of the Royal Police and other military and security institutions, who achieve an average grade of not less than 60 per cent in the Secondary School Certificate. Candidates should also meet other professional and procedural conditions related to their military position. The course of study lasts for four years and candidates are required to complete 123 credit hours to obtain a BSc degree (Oman Royal Police, 2001). The courses available enhance the efficiency of police officers and other staff who join the College, raise their awareness and their professional standard and keep them up to date with the latest research in their field. The College introduced the new BSc degree in 2000 and the intake of candidates in that year is expected to graduate at the end of the academic year 2003/04.

4.13 Institute of Banking and Financial Studies

This institute was established by the Central Bank of Oman in 1983, and was subsequently renamed the Institute of Banking and Financial Studies. Article 13 regarding its establishment stated that branches could be opened in other regions of the Sultanate if the need arose (Royal Decree no. 83/98). However, to date no branches have been opened. The reason might be that similar courses of study are available at the SQU College of Commerce and Economics as well as at some private and technical colleges.

The Institute of Banking and Financial Studies recently began to train students for international qualifications by running regular classes based on the credit hour system. In this respect, the Institute collaborates with the appropriate international bodies and institutes, for example, the Institute of Legal Insurance in the United Kingdom for the Certificate in Insurance, the National Computer Centre in the United Kingdom for the Diploma in Computing Studies, and the Institute of Canadian Bankers for the Diploma in Financial Service Studies (Institute of Banking and Financial Studies, 2000).

Table 4.16 shows that the number of applicants registered was varied during the 1990s. The proportion of female students averaged 44 per cent during these years, reaching a high of 55 per cent in 2000. This is yet another example of Omani women competing with men in every branch of academic studies and reflects the large number of women employed in the banking and financial sectors in Oman.

Table 4.16 No. of applicants registered in the Institute of Banking & Financial Studies: 1990/1991–2000/01

Academic Year	Male students	Female students	Female %age	Total
1990/91	147	67	31	214
1991/92	81	33	29	114
1992/93	57	35	38	92
1993/94	107	51	32	158
1994/95	146	56	28	202
1995/96	58	40	41	98
1996/97	32	31	49	63
1997/98	74	82	53	156
1998/99	132	111	46	243
1999/2000	171	208	55	379
2000/01	183	227	55	410
Total	1,188	941	44	2,129

Source: Annual Statistics, 1992 (The Development Council, 1993); *Annual Statistics, 2002* (Ministry of National Economy, 2002).

4.14 Scholarships

This sector has played an important role in absorbing more students into the institutions of higher education on the one hand, and contributing to the development of human resources on the other. What has distinguished it during the 1990s is the initiative taken by many families to finance their children's education abroad, owing to the small number of scholarships offered by the Omani government. Furthermore, the number of students following postgraduate courses abroad has increased noticeably.

In 2002 the proportion of scholarship students taking courses abroad was no higher than 4 per cent of the secondary school leavers (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002). This situation persuaded many students to attend universities in some of the neighbouring countries at their own expense, especially in the United Arab Emirates and India, where tuition and living expenses were within their means. Since there is no official contact between some families of these students and the Ministry of Higher Education concerning courses of study abroad, many Omani nationals studying overseas are not listed in the Ministry's records (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999f: 8). This has made it difficult to ascertain their exact number, though they are estimated in thousands. However, it has been found that some of these students have been registered with universities having a poor academic standard, where the qualifications are not universally recognized. This has led the Omani government to reject both the academic and professional certificates awarded by such universities.

Table 4.17 No. of government-sponsored students at overseas universities: 1991–2002

Academic Year	Total	Newly sponsored students	Newly sponsored staff
1991	704	60	11
1992	535	60	20
1993	547	100	20
1994	551	100	20
1995	587	100	20
1996	607	65	20
1997	617	67	20
1998	603	68	20
1999	554	60	20
2000	463	62	20
2001	462	105	20
2002	-	90	20

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2002.

The executive summary of the sixth Five-Year Plan stated that there were 554 scholarship students studying abroad in 1999, compared with 4,694 students studying abroad at their own expense or sponsored by an external fellowship (Ministry of National Economy, 2000: 3). This fact reflects the decreasing role of the government in awarding scholarships against the increasing role of families financing their children's higher education and the expansion of external fellowships. Between 1991 and 2002 the Omani government sponsored only 1,168 students, the annual breakdown of this total being shown in Table 4.17. On the other hand, the government sponsored more than a thousand students at universities and colleges in Oman, which indicates that its financial resources are now being concentrated on local education.

Omani female students comprise a fairly large proportion of the total number of students studying abroad. Most of them specialize in education and the humanities, as shown in Table 4.18. The high percentage of women studying

education is attributed to their preference for employment as teachers, for this profession is very secure and there are usually posts available in schools close to home. Another reason is that most of them prefer to be employed in girls' schools, or in schools following the basic education system, where pupils in grades 1 to 4 are also taught by female teachers.

Table 4.18 Nos. of female and male students studying abroad: 2001/02

Subject	Female students	Male students	Total
Medicine	203	83	286
Pharmacy	139	52	191
Engineering & applied science	79	599	678
Science	207	132	339
Agriculture	15	40	55
Computing	145	495	640
Education	5,220	1,294	6,514
Arts	301	230	531
Law	28	145	173
Business & administration	251	899	1,150
Politics & economics	12	75	87
Information	5	10	15
Islamic studies	39	37	76
Languages	3	10	13
Other	131	247	378
Total	6,778	4,348	11,126

Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2002.

4.15 Uncompleted Projects

There were a few higher education projects which, despite having been approved during the 1990s, were never fully completed. Their aim was to extend higher education beyond the capital city of Muscat. If they had been realized, these projects would have met the directives of Sultan Qaboos, who stressed the importance of

educating every Omani citizen in every corner of the country (Ministry of Information, 1995: 325).

In 1993 the Sultan issued directives to establish a maritime college in Salalah, a port on the southern coast of Oman (Ministry of Information, 1995: 380). An institution of this kind was necessary because Oman has a coastline of about 1,700 kilometres, extending from the Straits of Hormuz in the north to the borders of Yemen in the south. Therefore, Oman overlooks three seas: The Gulf, the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea (Ministry of National Economy, 1999: 5). The project aimed at training young Omanis so as to enable them to control the rich fishing resources, which are currently exploited by foreign fishing fleets. It also aimed at educating them in maritime transport law, as well as in regional and international water and maritime environmental issues.

To achieve this project, a comprehensive plan was prepared by experts, committees were established, and visits to similar educational institutions in other countries were organized. Academic experts began to plan the courses of study and all the financial, administrative and academic arrangements were finalized. Despite all these efforts, the project was postponed and finally abandoned.

Also in 1993 the Sultan issued directives for the establishment of a higher institute of arts in Sohar (Ministry of Information, 1995: 381). However, after the plans had been prepared and a site selected for the institute, the project documents were filed away in the hope that it could be revived in the future.

During the National Day Festival in Nizwa in 1994, the Sultan announced another project. Research was currently being conducted into the establishment of a higher institute of juridical studies in Nizwa, which would offer postgraduate courses

to holders of a degree in Shari'ah and law (Ministry of Information, 1995: 394). This project met the same fate as the other two already mentioned.

Since these ambitious projects proposed by Sultan Qaboos were not achieved, questions could be raised about the real reasons for cancelling or postponing them. Were they based on problems in financing, administration or planning? What about the effort put into the relevant research and the cost entailed? What was the reason for the failure of the educational projects that the government wished to establish around the regions? Would these projects be considered part of the government's efforts in seeking stability in higher education? The answer to all these questions is the lack of a Council for Higher Education until 1998, the limited power of the Ministry of Higher Education, and the influence of certain government officials who did not want to establish higher education institutions around the regions because their businesses and interests were in Muscat. All of these factors could create instability in the higher education sector in Oman. However, the establishment of the Council for Higher Education in 1998 might provide the solution to this problem.

4.16 Conclusion

The most important characteristics of higher education in Oman during the 1990s and the beginning of the new millennium are:

- Establishing the Ministry of Higher Education in 1994 to supervise and monitor higher education in Oman and co-ordinate the work of its institutions with the Higher Education Council, which was created in 1998 to draw up higher education policies.
- Upgrading many state higher education institutions and their programs, such as the Intermediate Teacher-Training Colleges to University Colleges of Education,

the Technical Industrial Colleges to Higher Colleges of Technology, and introducing many postgraduate programmes at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU).

- Including the private sector in higher education programmes by opening private colleges and universities in various regions of Oman. This trend has been supported by the government, which has given some financial help towards these tax-free projects and sponsored a large number of their students.
- Introducing many new laws and regulations to organize state and private higher education, as well as amending some of the current laws to cover the national and international changes, for example, the regulation of colleges of education, SQU, private universities and colleges, scholarships, the College of Shari‘ah and Law, and the Academy for Police Studies.
- Oman was classified as the Arab country with the lowest ratio of students to tutors, that is, 11:1, even though this increased the cost per student (UNESCO, 1998: 52). Oman was also the first Gulf state to give particular attention to teacher-training, for the government does not recruit untrained teachers. A study conducted by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States showed that Oman was the country employing the lowest number of teachers who were not qualified in education. In 1996 their proportion was 6.8 per cent, compared with other Gulf countries, where the proportion ranged from 13.2 to 35.7 per cent. Among Omani teachers, the proportion is even lower, that is, 2.4 per cent (Şā’igh & Mutawallī, 2000: 130–131). Internationally, 64 per cent of the total number of teachers – 56.6 million – are employed in the developing countries. Most of them are not well qualified and have not received any kind of teacher-training (Avalos, 2000: 461).

On the other hand, higher education in Oman has encountered a few problems, such as:

- Decentralization of the authority governing higher education, for different authorities control higher education institutions including the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Royal Court and SQU. This situation has caused higher education to lose its identity in the creation of a clearly defined long-term national strategy for education.
- Inability of many higher education institutions to cope with the increasing number of secondary school leavers owing to their limited capacity. This has been an issue that has resulted in greater economic and social pressure on the government, whose aim is to secure enough educational opportunities for students wishing to pursue their studies at degree level. For example, out of 32,212 secondary school leavers, only 10,220 (31 per cent), were admitted to higher education institutions in Oman and abroad in the academic year 2001/02. Of the total population aged between 18 and 24, the proportion of admitted students was only 12.6 per cent in 2000 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002). This percentage is not low compared with the international average, which was 17.4 per cent in 1997, and the average of the Arab world, which was 14.9 per cent in the same year. Nevertheless, it is much lower than the average of the developed countries, which is 61.1 per cent (Billah, 2002: 8).
- Lack of commitment by some higher education institutions to the requirements of quality assurance owing to either an excessive intake capacity without

sufficient support or faulty administrative practices. Another reason could be that some private colleges are more interested in making a profit.

- Lack of sufficient co-ordination between higher education institutions with regard to the courses of study and admissions policy on the one hand, and between these institutions and the authorities and personnel planners on the other. This factor leads to unemployment among graduates.
- Insufficient academic and vocational counselling at higher education institutions, and thus students have been obliged to study certain specializations or enrol for courses in subjects that are not needed by the labour market.
- Increase in the drop-out rate of technical education students, the proportion being about 25 per cent according to the Ministry of National Economy (2002b). Of course, this is considered high, yet it reflects only the foundation course students, though other students do leave later on. This phenomenon could be attributed to the fact that students are aware that they will not find employment opportunities after graduation. Furthermore, it is due to the inappropriate courses offered at technical colleges, the lack of a clearly defined policy for this type of education and poor co-ordination with the labour market.
- Limited participation of higher education institutions in research and study work activities, especially those related to community issues and problems. This could be due to low financial allocation for this purpose, which was estimated at 0.08 per cent of the total national income in 1996. In other Arab countries it was 0.15 per cent and in the developed countries 3.2 per cent. This is in addition to the lack of a suitable and adequate basis for scientific research and the lack of a

clearly defined strategy to develop this sector (Ministry of National Economy, 2002b: 92–94).

- The government has not yet decided on the ultimate aim of education: whether it should be based on employment requirements or offered for its own sake. If the aim is the former and the government plans to develop human resources to meet the local labour market needs with qualified staff in different specializations – as was pointed out by development planners – then it is its responsibility to provide employment opportunities for all graduates in either the state or private sector. However, if the aim is to provide citizens with knowledge and culture without considering future employment within the country, then this requires the provision of higher education opportunities for everyone without discrimination based on age or sex. Therefore, graduates should accept this fact and not request the government to find employment for them, as is currently the case. Sultan Qaboos in his speech at the Convening of the Council of Oman on 4 November 2002 discussed this point and the combined efforts of the government and the private sector to solve the problem of unemployed graduates of higher education institutions:

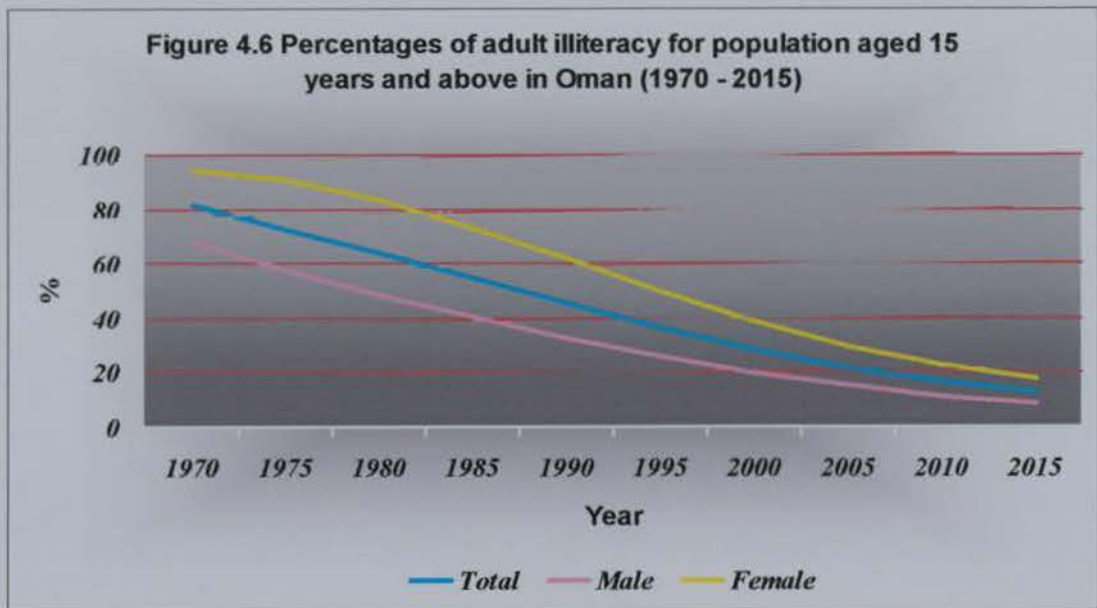
We have always affirmed, on various occasions, that the human being is the ultimate goal of development, and its instrument and means at the same time. The more effective this instrument, the more capable it becomes of achieving the targeted development. Thus we always call for the development of human resources, their scientific capabilities, technical skills and technological expertise in order to meet society's urgent requirements and needs, and to provide opportunities for those resources to contribute fully to the blessed renaissance witnessed by Oman in all walks of life.

Last year, through this Council, we called on the private sector to open its doors to the sons and daughters of Oman and to provide employment for them in its establishments and companies, whether big or small, for each in his relevant field.

We are pleased to say today that the response from the private sector to that national call has been good and has reflected the sector's patriotic spirit and attitude towards society. (Oman News Agency, 2002)

It should be stated that the World Summit on Sustainable Development, which was held in South Africa in September 2002, expressed the necessity to provide opportunities in both state and private education for all citizens in order to eradicate illiteracy and to promote the importance of lifelong education and development (United Nations, 2002).

It can be seen from Figure 4.6 that there has been a gradual decrease in illiteracy in Oman, which is expected to fall to 12.9 per cent in 2015, compared with 81.5 per cent in 1970.



Source: UNESCO, 2002.

- Although higher education constituted only 1.1 per cent of total public expenditure, the cost of a university student was the highest in the Arab world in 1996 UNESCO, 1998: 34, 35). This indicates the gap between the input into higher education and the cost entailed.

Current Features and Future Challenges

Introduction

Since the 1970s, Oman has experienced accelerated economic, social and cultural development owing to ample oil revenues and investment in the country's economic reforms. This period has witnessed the expansion of education as evidenced by the increase in the number of pupils attending school. There were 555,393 pupils enrolled in state schools during 2000/01 (Ministry of Education, 2002). This number constitutes more than 31 per cent of the total Omani population in 2000, which is about 1,777,685 (Ministry of National Economy, 2002b). This situation has been the result of the government's interest in education, the growth in the population – which averaged 4.3 per cent between 1975 and 1999, improvements in health services, and better living conditions owing to the increase in individual incomes. The gross national income was US\$13,688 million in 1999 (UNDP, 2002a).

These conditions enabled the government to give special attention to education, which was considered a priority within the national development plans for the last three decades of the twentieth century. Since 1970, Sultan Qaboos has emphasized the role of the government in providing education for all Omani citizens so that they can hold positions that were previously occupied by expatriates.

An examination of higher education and the successive changes in its plans, courses and mechanisms during the last three decades of the twentieth century, gives the impression that it is still at the developmental stage and subject to discussion and participation by all the parties concerned. It is understood that higher education is

important in enhancing effort and production in the workplace and acquiring knowledge and communication skills through research. For Oman, it plays a fundamental role in framing the country's general policies and improving the industrial sector. It is equally important in economics, health and education by providing these sectors with qualified people. Higher education can contribute to the principles of democracy, which are based on respecting individual values and principles on the one hand, and the adherence to the traditions and rules of society by individuals on the other.

Based on the ideas discussed above, higher education in Oman has witnessed both qualitative and quantitative developments, as well as successive organizational and structural changes. The aim has always been the achievement of greater stability in this sector, which identifies the objectives of this type of education in the global changes, along with maintaining its national cultural basis. I will focus on current trends in higher education in Oman with regard to the size and type of its institutions, the courses of study, the certificates awarded, as well as its main characteristics, the obstacles to be overcome, and finally, proposals and recommendations.

5.1 Philosophy and Aims of Education

The Omani philosophy of education, which was formulated in 1978, is based on several main principles as follows. The integrated development of the individual, social liberation, modernization of Omani society, economic development, national unity, national strength and the uniqueness of Omani culture. From these principles the Omani government derived the general aims of education in the Sultanate as follows:

- To provide members of society with basic knowledge and to develop the mental abilities that they will need throughout their lives.
- To help learners acquire the basic principles and ideals of Islam as the basis of the belief in God.
- To ensure the full physical development of learners.
- To develop a positive attitude of learners towards nature, work, society and the arts.
- To prepare learners for earning a living and acquiring a respect for employment.
- To meet the needs of society with the provision of skilled labour at all levels so as to carry out developmental projects.
- To educate Omani citizens about their rights and duties towards their country, and their obligations towards their people.
- To encourage learners to use their spare time for constructive hobbies by training them in suitable skills according to their interests and abilities.
- To provide all available educational facilities by every possible means to all members and classes of the society according to their abilities and interests throughout their lives.

(Ministry of Education, 1996)

Since it was drafted in 1978, the Omani philosophy has become an outdated document in urgent need of redrafting. Throughout the world, many aspects of life have been subject to change and regeneration, such as the provision of information, skills, culture, economic development, etc. Furthermore, the current Omani philosophy was prepared by a committee consisting only of Jordanian consultants and members of the Directorate of Research and Development in the Ministry of

Education. Instead, the committee should have included all the parties concerned, namely, politicians, economists, religious leaders, scholars and social studies experts, as well as parents and learners. The drafting of a national plan requires the participation of all sectors of society to enable education planners to base it on reliable information and examples and to include realistic aims. Excluding relevant contributors from the committee will result in a mismatch between education output and society's needs and aspirations. This has been true of the higher education system in particular. The problem came to light in the 1990s when some higher education institutions complained about the standard of secondary school leavers applying to join courses of study. The institutions were obliged to organize remedial courses to improve the standard of these students, especially in mathematics, science and English. In addition, students who could not enter higher education institutions were unable to find suitable employment owing to their inadequate vocational qualifications at school, thus constituting a burden on the country.

5.1.1 Aims of Higher Education

Oman's education policy has been derived from the Basic Law of the State, which says that education is aimed at upgrading and developing the level of general culture and scientific thinking, as well as meeting the requirements of economic and social policies (al-Manthri, 2002).

From this statement the Omani Ministry of Higher Education has derived the following main aims of higher education:

- to emphasize the importance of the principles of Islamic and Arab culture in the students' pride in the heritage, customs and traditions of their society;

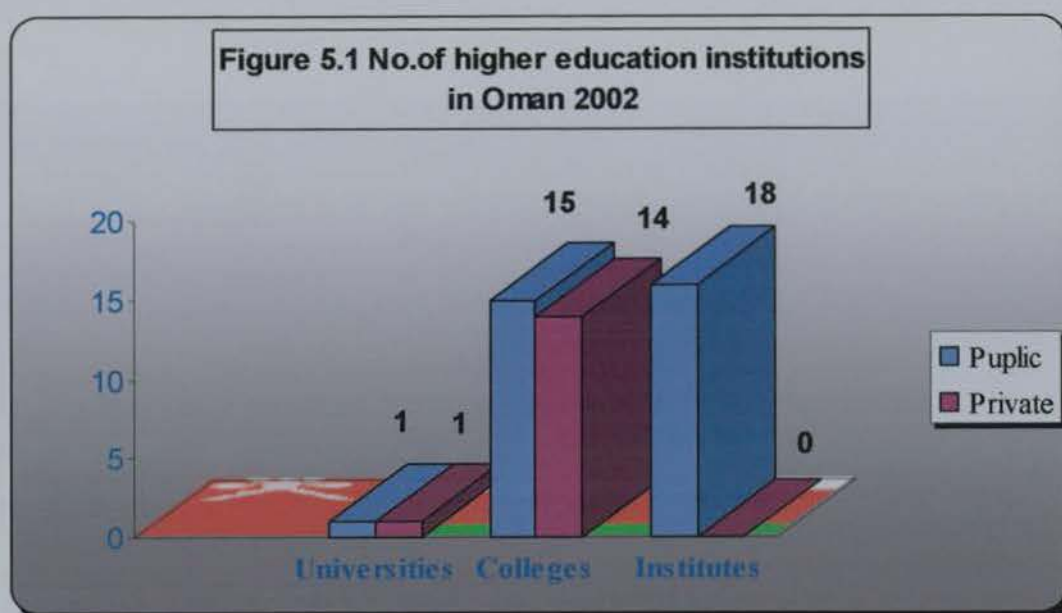
- to educate citizens who are capable of taking on the responsibility of playing a crucial role in maintaining the national and cultural objectives of Oman;
- to educate suitable applicants and provide them with the relevant expertise and experience so as to produce highly qualified technicians to meet the demands of the labour market;
- to provide the educational culture necessary to encourage experts to make a constructive contribution towards research and development in science and technology and apply the results of research to the advancement of science and comprehensive development plans;
- to provide the educational and experiential culture necessary for producing experts to contribute to Oman's socio-economic development;
- to ensure the establishment of strong and consistent foundations of society so that all Omani citizens can contribute towards the development and preservation of Oman's national and cultural heritage.

(al-Hashmi, 1999)

These aims strike the researcher as reasonable. However, as usual the problems arise in translating these objectives on the ground. I have given examples of this in the preceding pages.

5.2 Quantitative Development of Higher Education Institutions

In 1980 there was only one teacher-training institute in Oman. It admitted secondary school leavers for one year's training as elementary school teachers. Today, there are 49 institutions of higher education, including universities, colleges and institutes. Figure 5.1 shows the number and type of these institutions.



It is clear from the figure that the number of institutions of private education is increasing, for there will be three more universities in the regions of Muscat, Nizwa and Dhofar, besides a private university already established in Sohar. In the early years, the government restricted the establishment of higher education to ensure a minimum standard of quality, an aspect which is rarely considered by the private sector, whose goal is to make a profit.

5.3 Higher Education Admissions Policy

As in other Arab countries, Oman applies a strict admissions policy. This policy aims at admitting an intake of appropriate candidates to institutions of higher education according to specific terms and conditions. Therefore, it is a selective policy which admits those who satisfy the conditions, especially with regard to the pass mark achieved in the Secondary School Certificate (Khashāb & al-ash-ab, 2001: 36). For example, the institutions of higher education admitted only 14,500 out of 32,000

applicants in 2001/02 (al-Manthri, 2002a). Although the proportion of admissions seems high, yet it constituted only 12.6 per cent of the 18–24 age group, which totalled 296,619 in 2000 (Ministry of Higher Education, 2002b).

The result is that most of the applicants admitted are registered for courses that are not of their choosing, for only those who achieve a particularly high pass mark in the Secondary School Certificate can select their subject of study. This policy makes some students change their disciplines at a later stage during their course of study when they have the opportunity to do so. Others are subject to academic probation, which may result in delaying their graduation or even in being sent down. This issue has been presented earlier in the discussion of Sultan Qaboos University.

5.4 Characteristics of Higher Education in Oman

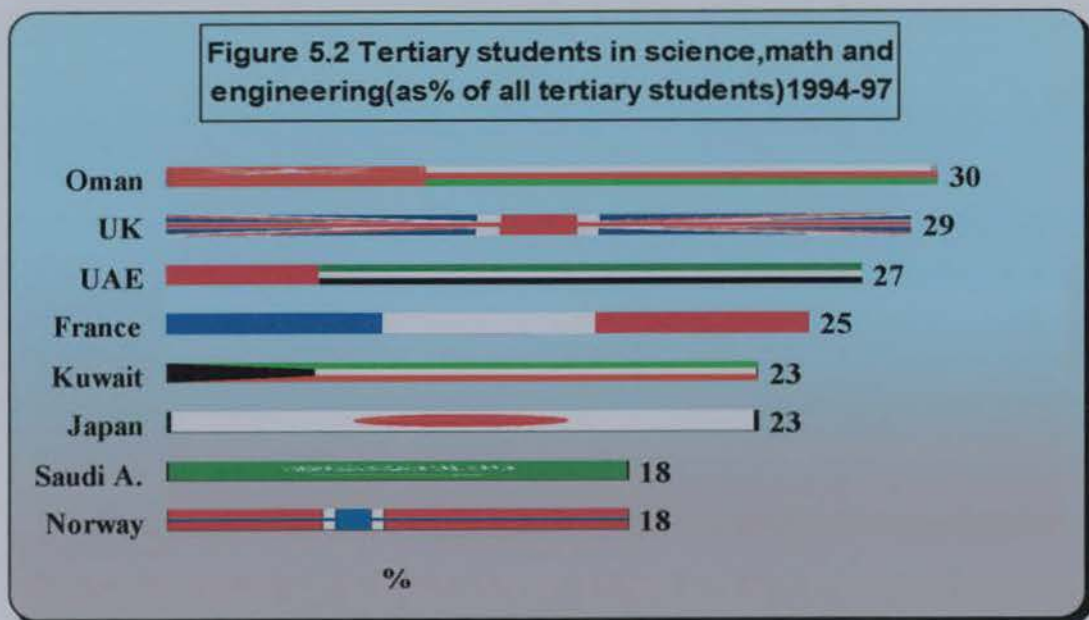
Owing to national and international influences, the following results have been observed in higher education in Oman:

- There has been an increase in the demand for higher education as a result of the growth in population and consequently the output of secondary school leavers, as well as society's recognition of the importance of higher education.
- There has been an upgrading of state institutions of higher education and expansion of their capacity to absorb the increasing number of secondary school leavers.
- A growing interest by the private sector in higher education has led to the establishment of private institutions in different regions of Oman. Despite this, such institutions are limited, for they cannot absorb the increasing number of students, and they offer almost similar courses, including Administration and

Business Studies. Another factor is that most of these institutions are based in the capital area of Muscat.

- An increasing proportion of registered female students compared with male students has prompted the government to promote a strict admissions policy. This unwritten policy has limited the number of female students entering institutions of higher education, for, otherwise, they would outnumber the male students, since girls usually achieve higher grades than boys in the Secondary School Certificate. This situation has persuaded the decision-makers in higher education to specify the numbers of male and female applicants to be admitted to institutions of higher education in each academic year. Some institutions allocate no more than 50 per cent of the total available places to female applicants.
- There is a relatively small number of female students specializing in science subjects for social, economic and cultural reasons. Many women prefer not to pursue scientific and technical studies because, they declare, there are practical obstacles that face women when they take up employment. Also, many of them cannot find employment near home, and they are constrained by the conservative attitude of some families that do not approve of mixed-sex workplaces. Furthermore, many state and private bodies prefer to employ men, for they are considered more productive, especially if women cannot pursue an unbroken career because of the pregnancy and maternity leave to which they are entitled.
- A disproportionate number of students enter the humanities and art faculties because of their social and cultural backgrounds and the limited number of places available in the institutions of higher education in Oman. There may not

be sufficient employment opportunities in these areas of study, which can lead to unemployment. There are many girls who enter colleges of education both in Oman and abroad every year, despite the fact that the Ministry of Education has no vacancies for them. This is in addition to the output of graduates from the SQU colleges of humanities, who have difficulty in finding employment after graduation. Nevertheless, Oman still has a large proportion of higher education students specializing in sciences, mathematics and engineering compared with many developed countries such as Norway, Japan, France, the United Kingdom, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, and semi-developed countries such as Saudi Arabia according to the *Human Development Report 2002* as shown in Figure 5.2.



Source: United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), 2002.

- University places were allocated to students dependent on social security as well as those from low-income households. The scheme was begun in the teacher-training colleges, which offered places to students living in remote parts of the country. This was a positive contribution to the Omanization of the teaching profession, especially since most of the teachers in those areas are non-Omani.
- Some specializations in the humanities have been cancelled by some institutions of higher education, which now prefer to concentrate on science subjects. This trend has appeared as a result of labour market needs, where graduates in science and technology are preferred. Though it is an appropriate move by these institutions, there should be comprehensive and accurate planning before applying this policy. If it is implemented at random, secondary school pupils specializing in literature will not be able to pursue their university studies if priority is given to applicants specializing in science. According to Ministry of Education statistics, the proportion of pupils specializing in literature was 47 per cent in 1999/2000 (Ministry of Education, 2000: 84).
- There has been a marked instability in technical education, for numerous syllabi have been tried so far, such as the Oman National Diploma (OND), Higher National Diploma (HND), and General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ). This situation can be attributed to the lack of a clear-cut government policy for this type of education, in addition to the continual changes in the administrative staff.
- The limited role of the private sector in internal and external scholarship programmes has made it difficult for the government to provide education for the increasing number of students. Some families are financing the education of

their sons and daughters at universities and colleges abroad. Most of these students pursue courses in the humanities, the cost of which is not high.

- Most graduate students prefer employment that has economic and social value, though it might not be relevant to their qualifications and experience. This has resulted in numerous employees occupying unsuitable posts, especially in government departments. Many graduates avoid employment in the private sector, for it does not provide security and they are offered junior posts which are either inappropriate for the graduates' qualifications or they are low-paid.

5.5 The Extent of Success and Failure

The success of any institution of higher education is determined by four basic criteria: a high-quality institution, well-designed courses, motivated students, and adequate financial resources. The UNESCO and International World Bank Report on higher education in the developing world, prepared by experts from thirteen countries, pointed out that higher education does not meet these criteria (World Bank & UNESCO, 2000). If measured according to these criteria, higher education in Oman has the following features.

5.5.1 Quality of the Institutions

Many of the institutions have met the quality conditions specified by the Ministry of Higher Education and the Council for Higher Education during the second half of the 1990s. The quality conditions included the type of construction, educational premises and supporting services such as libraries, computing and language laboratories. Other conditions included the qualifications of the teaching staff, student admissions policy, academic syllabi and assessment. It should be pointed out that some institutions of higher education, especially those in the private sector, did not meet all

of these conditions, either because of inadequate financial resources or management problems.

5.5.2 Quality of the Courses

The Accreditation Board was established in 2001 with the aim of drawing up policies for accrediting academic courses. This aim cannot be realized without including experts and specialists in all fields of knowledge. It will be necessary to consult expatriate experts during the initial stage. A positive step has been taken by the Gulf Co-operation Council countries for the establishment of a common authority for accreditation and documentation (*al-Waṭan*, 2002). This authority will standardize both accreditation and the financial resources of institutions of higher education.

5.5.3 Financial Resources

With regard to financing, institutions of higher education in Oman are classified as follows:

- Public institutions that are wholly financed by the government, such as SQU and public colleges and institutes.
- Private institutions that are financed by both the government and the private sector.
- Private sector institutions that are financed only by the private sector, though the government contributes indirectly by sponsoring students from low-income families.

Indeed, the government provides institutions of public education with all kinds of resources to achieve its objectives. Therefore, an annual budget is allocated and announced officially. Though the government allocates only 3 million Omani riyals to private universities, it provides free land and does not impose taxes or duty

on these institutions. It is too early to say whether the private sector can afford to finance its private universities, for the one institution of this kind was established only in 2001. However, the private sector has managed to finance its own colleges independently despite the fact that some of them face problems.

5.5.4 Type and Quality of Student Intake and Output

The quality of higher education output in Oman can be measured by assessment studies that are conducted from time to time by external bodies and UNESCO. As mentioned earlier, SQU was evaluated by an international team in 1990, and again in 1998. These studies revealed the weaknesses in the educational system. The teacher-training colleges were assessed in 1994 and again in 1998 by specialists from SQU, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education. These studies highlighted the inefficiency of the teacher-training courses. Other studies were carried out by experts from Edinburgh University with the aim of developing the educational system in the colleges and upgrading their future role.

In many developing countries, a large number of institutions of higher education faced problems and could not promote their educational systems owing to their random application, which caused a deterioration in their quality. An example is staff promotion, which is subject to a bureaucratic system under which members of staff are promoted according to their length of service, without considering research activities and distinguished performance, qualities that are rarely applied in education (World Bank & UNESCO, 2000).

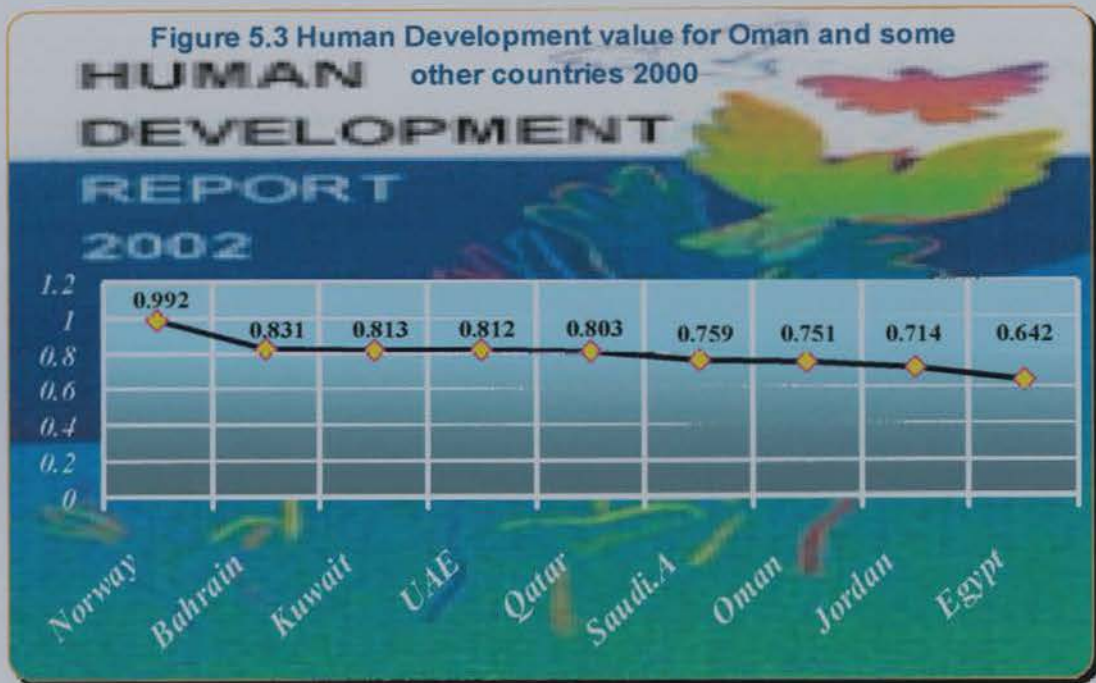
SQU tried to implement this system of staff promotion in 1998, when a ministerial committee was established to assess the university at that time. The committee recommended promoting staff according to the length of service. It was

asserted that members of the university academic staff were not free to carry out research work owing to the insufficient number of suitable workshops and laboratories. The recommendation was not considered and research work is still taken into account when promoting a staff member. This system is also implemented in the colleges of education and the College of Shari'ah and Law. The criteria in other institutions of higher education are not fixed; though the Ministry of the Civil Service and its Council emphasize the idea of promotion based on the length of service. This situation has made it difficult for the Ministry of Higher Education, for example, to implement the financial rules for promoting academic staff in the colleges of education in 1998. This has been the result of opposition from the Ministry of the Civil Service, which has refused to implement the rules, although they were issued by a Royal Decree (Ministry of Higher Education, 1999g). Such invalid models of administration were those which were highlighted in the UNESCO and World Bank Report mentioned earlier.

The UNESCO and the World Bank Report also concluded that a large number of new university students were not well prepared academically. In other words, they were not well taught at school, especially at the secondary stage, which suffers from many defects. These students also face problems in pursuing their degree studies, since they are offered a very narrow range of courses. Furthermore, institutions of higher education rarely offer remedial courses to this category of students (World Bank & UNESCO, 2000). The authorities in Oman acknowledge the existence of the gap between the secondary school curriculum and the university courses (al-Manthri, 2002). This situation persuaded all private and public institutions of higher education to offer remedial courses, mainly in English

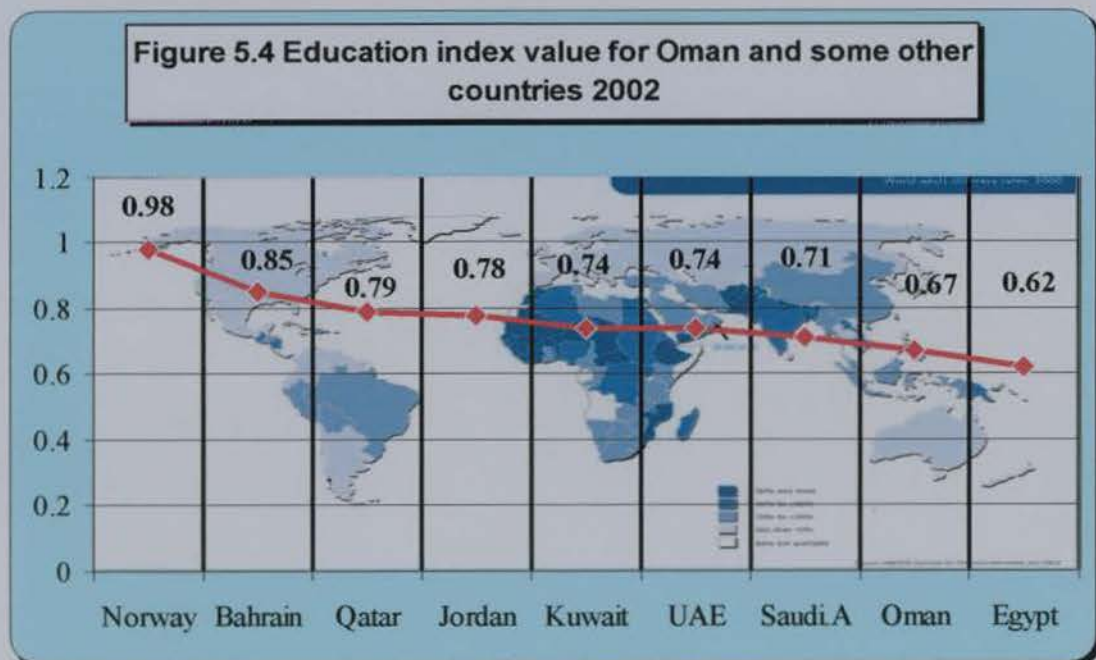
language. Most institutions offer intensive English language courses for a period of one year or more to improve students' language skills. Some institutions offer new students a one-year foundation course to bridge the gap between the secondary and university stages.

It is well known that one means of measuring the success of higher education output is the extent to which it contributes to the development of human resources. A report on this aspect was prepared by the UNDP in 2001. Focusing on the role of the latest technology in this area, the report added one more criterion to the three basic elements of development: age range at birth, level of literacy among adults, and the individual annual income. According to this report, Oman is classified among the 78 countries that have an average level of development in human resources. There are 10 Arab countries within this group. Other Arab countries, such as Bahrain, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar are placed in the first category of the 48 countries that have a high level of development in human resources. Figure 5.2 shows the position of Oman compared with other Arab countries and Norway, which is at the top of the scale. Oman is rated at 0.751, whereas Norway, for example, is rated at 0.992 as shown in Figure 5.3.



Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2002.

With regard to education, Oman is at 0.67, whereas Norway, for example, is at 0.98 as shown in Figure 5.4.



Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2002.

5.6 Challenges Facing Higher Education

As part of the global system, higher education in Oman is influenced by its changes, renovations and challenges. According to Levine (2002), the challenges facing higher education include privatization, new technologies, population structure, and globalization and its economics. There are also other factors such as financing, academic freedom and quality. These factors are examined in more detail below.

5.6.1 Privatization

Higher education has been the concern of the government in Oman, for institutions have been established, staffed and monitored by government departments. In the mid-1990s, the private sector started investing in higher education. This step was taken, firstly, to absorb the increasing number of secondary school leavers, which was beyond the capacity of the state institutions of higher education, and secondly, to alleviate the high cost to the state of managing these institutions. However, the challenge here is the extent to which the private sector can provide education of good quality and sufficient variety to meet the ambitions of citizens and society on the one hand, and the needs of the labour market on the other. Though the government has imposed strict regulations on investment in higher education by the private sector, for example, that colleges and universities should not focus on profit, in reality, it is profit that dominates the private sector plans. Therefore, it could be said that the private sector has not yet contributed efficiently to the development of human resources in higher education.

5.6.2 New Technologies

Nowadays, new technologies play a vital role in all aspects of our life including education. While technology was once considered a tool for acquiring information, it has since become a means of directing this information. It is now the subject of policies based on its success and effectiveness, as well as a means of paving the way to new horizons of research and discovery. Furthermore, technical know-how includes the study of economic, social and cultural contexts, besides the tools of technology and their application (Abu Sulayman, 2001: 154:155). That is why it has become essential for institutions of higher education in Oman to be equipped with the appropriate new technology to develop education as well as to provide students with the information that they need to use the various technology tools efficiently and accurately.

Oman, like many other countries around the world, took the necessary action and introduced the new technologies in all public sectors and services including health, education, transport, communications, etc. The idea was to facilitate public services and encourage investment in computing and relevant applications, thereby paving the way towards establishing an e-government in the near future (Middle East Online, 2002).

As early as the 1980s, Oman introduced information technology systems and programs in different areas, the most important of which was education. For example, Sultan Qaboos University was the pioneer in the introduction of information technology and training programmes in departments such as the colleges of engineering and science. Computer laboratories have been established to serve both the university staff and the students. Computer applications have been extended

to all state schools and institutions of higher education during the last few years. The Internet service was introduced in 1997, attracting a monthly average of 550 new members (General Telecommunications Organization, 2002).

The majority of pupils in Oman who complete secondary school then enter the post-secondary institutes of education within the country or abroad, or they seek employment. So far there has been no study of their computing capabilities in the workplace or at the foreign institutes of education. However, it can be expected that at the beginning they do not fare as well as their colleagues at Western universities, although they do tend to acquire the technical knowledge over time. As the workplaces in Oman increase automation and hence computerization, the need for computer literacy will be important and necessary for the Omanization policies (al-Naamany and al-Rumhy 1991).

In general, universities, university colleges and institutes of education have recently incorporated many new computer applications and tools in their curricula and training programmes.

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the first state university in Oman, was established in 1986 with seven colleges: Education, Arts, Medicine, Engineering, Science, Agriculture, and Commerce and Economics. Since that date, the government has been introducing education technology into the higher education sector. The University established a computing department, information technology laboratories, and a computing centre. The last provides technical information by creating and developing systems for use in education, training and scientific research. Systems are also applied in academic courses, finance and administration, health care programmes in the University Hospital, and admission and registration procedures.

The education technology centre is one of the organizations supporting the educational process. It assists academic departments in enhancing the efficiency of teaching with the use of modern educational theories. The centre also provides training in and advice on the use of audio-visual aids. It plays a vital role in television photography and other photographic work required in academic courses and extra-curricula activities. This is in addition to its role in maintaining and updating education technology equipment.

Other university premises include many computing laboratories, which allow students and staff 24-hour access, and libraries that use electronic indexing systems. These libraries are well equipped and provided with electronic and manual references and periodicals and audio-visual aids. Besides information technology sections in the departments of engineering, science and commerce and economics, the University offers many mandatory and optional courses in computing for those students reading other subjects (Sultan Qaboos University, 1998). The University also offers a training programme for Omanis drawn from the public and private sectors, leading to the award of a diploma in Computer and Information Systems (CIS) (Sultan Qaboos University, 2002).

Other state and private university colleges in Oman also depend heavily on modern education technology, especially the use of computers for teaching and learning. Most private colleges have departments of information technology, such as the College of Administration Science, the Modern College of Business and Science, the Caledonian College of Engineering, the National College of Science and Technology, and Muscat College. Other colleges offer courses in information technology to students from different departments. The teacher-training colleges

under the Ministry of Higher Education and the College of Shari'ah and Law provide information technology courses for their first-year students. These colleges have learning resource centres, which are based on computer applications and information technology such as the Internet, electronic references and audio-visual aids (Ministry of Higher Education, 2003b).

Teaching at the technical colleges is also based on information technology. They have departments of computing, and also use computers in other departments such as electrical engineering and business. These colleges are well equipped with the latest teaching media in laboratories and classrooms such as computers, multimedia in language laboratories and other audio-visual aids (Ministry of Social Affairs, Labour and Vocational Training, 1999).

The general trend of the application of information technology by individuals and public departments is well justified. Many of the daily activities in both public and private institutions are carried out with the use of computers. It is worth mentioning that employment vacancies in the public and private sectors require knowledge of and experience in computer applications and information technology. This has resulted in an increasing number of unemployed graduates who do not have this type of experience. This situation could have persuaded the government to implement and expand the application of information technology in education and also encouraged students to following training courses to acquire the necessary skills.

According to the United Nations for Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Oman has already begun constructing an information technology centre. After completion, the centre will attract investors in software and Internet service projects, and encourage development in these areas. This centre will include a

College of Information Technology and a Centre of Engineering, Research and Development (Middle East On-line, 2002a). It is expected that the Centre will contribute to the promotion and dissemination of up-to-date information technology in Oman. It will bring about an increase in the number of individuals and corporations concerned with the information technology industry, as well as in the number of personal computers. Other goals of the Centre include supporting the education sector and supplying it with the most relevant and up-to-date information technology.

The courses of study in the new College of Information Technology have begun in October 2002 with three main disciplines: computer technology, programming, and Internet technology and networks. Arabic will be the language of instruction to allow as many students as possible to join the college.

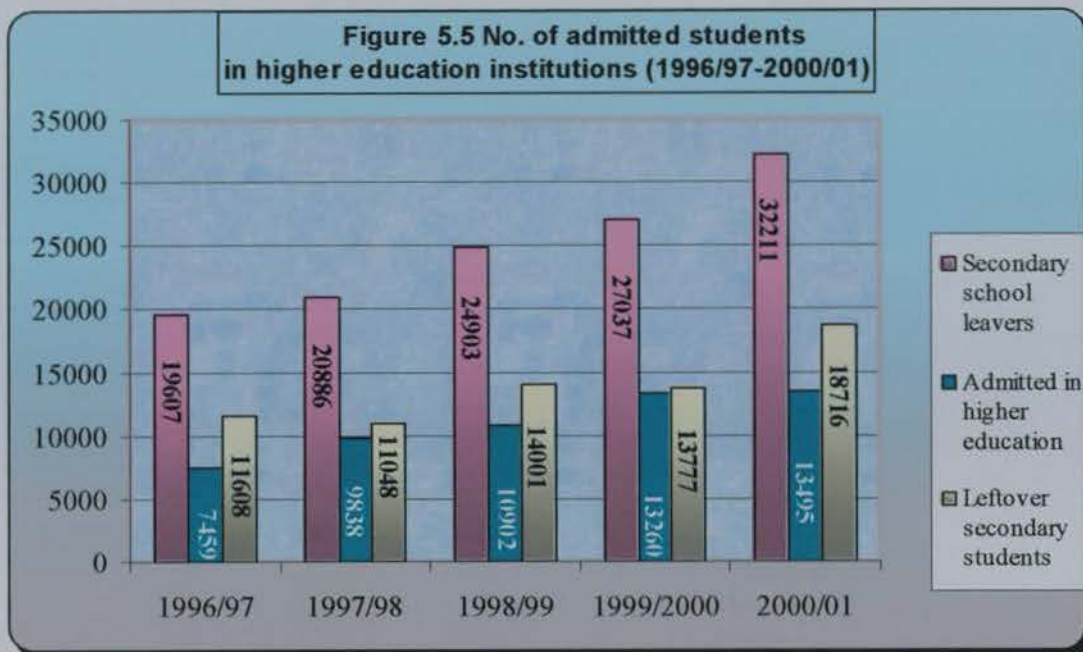
In March 2002 the government signed an agreement for the strategic study of the information technology sector to be carried out in the Sultanate. The study will determine and develop a business strategy for the Sultanate's information sector. It will also set specifications and design a one-stop shop project to serve as a model for e-government. The agreement will allow the government to adopt a scientifically based national strategy by integrating various information systems of a national character, and it will also help clarify many aspects of e-government and e-commerce (Oman News Agency, 2002).

Finally, higher education institutions themselves should develop this technology and study its effect on the people who use it. It could be very beneficial if new technology were used to create a nation-wide communications network of educational institutions, including pupils, students, teachers and parents, as well as

establishing communication links between the educational institutions of Oman with those of other countries.

5.6.3 Population Growth

Since 1970, Oman has witnessed a rapid growth in its population, owing to improvements in health services and living conditions as a result of economic prosperity. In 1999, citizens under the age of 15 constituted 44 per cent of the total population. These two factors meant that the government had to draw up policies and apply appropriate mechanisms of admission to institutions of higher education so as to increase their capacity for absorbing the maximum number of applicants by offering a range of courses. The aim of the current Five-Year Plan (2001-2005) is to increase the proportion of admissions to state institutions of higher education to 52 per cent and to private institutions to 25 per cent. If this plan is implemented, it will be one solution to the problem of making further education available to the large number of secondary school leavers, provided that all the conditions are met to achieve this goal. It should be pointed out that the results of the previous two Five-Year Plans do not indicate that the current Plan will achieve its objectives in this area. Though the two previous Plans included establishing institutions of higher education and allocating more scholarships, nothing was achieved because, it was asserted, the budget was insufficient. It should be emphasized that the plans have to be implemented by the authorities concerned in order to improve higher education and its infrastructure throughout the Sultanate. Figure 5.5 shows the number of students admitted to higher education institutions from 1996/97 to 2000/01.



Source: Ministry of Higher Education, 2002.

5.6.4 Globalization

Globalization has permeated every corner of the world to the extent that no country can reject or ignore it. It has taken different forms such as the imposition of a specific culture, or the sponsorship by well-known international universities or institutions of higher education in other countries. It has been noticed that the economic and cultural changes accompanying globalization have made many researchers look for the most suitable ways in which institutions of higher education can keep pace with this new international trend. As a result, different schools of thought have arisen. Some believe that the whole education system should train citizens by focusing on national education (Reich, 1992). Others, who are concerned with co-operation and interaction among nations, emphasize raising people's awareness of the world's cultures (Garrido, 1991: 5-14). Some scholars call for the improvement of knowledge and skills that enable a nation to be internationally competitive (Blair,

1991: 30–31), while others add that a country should keep track of and acquire the latest technology (Haddad, 1997: 43).

The current perception of globalization and its adoption by many countries has required the institutions of higher education to initiate a debate on the new principle so as to adapt it to the needs, circumstances and principles of each society. Despite the various advantages of the globalization of education, it does have some drawbacks, which should be monitored carefully. They include the spread of low-quality higher education that aims at marketing false certificates and degrees; and the establishment of branches of highly reputable universities in other countries, without applying the quality control that is part of those universities. Many American and European universities have initiated this idea by establishing links with institutions of higher education in developing countries with the aim of making a profit rather than disseminating international academic knowledge (World Bank & UNESCO, 2000). This is clearly exemplified in the private institutions of higher education in Oman, for many of them are affiliated to American and European institutions of higher education, some of which are not of a high standard in their own countries.

Therefore, the question to be asked here is whether the level and quality of the education in the private sector institutions in Oman are similar to that of American and European colleges. This situation requires the Ministry of Higher Education, the Council for Higher Education and the Accreditation Board to monitor carefully and follow up the management of the private colleges so as to ensure that they apply quality assurance procedures. Other consequences of globalization include changes in the mission of higher education. Instead of attracting the best category of learners, institutions of higher education have begun to offer education

for all types of students, and to introduce distance learning courses (Bujra, 2001: 267). Many institutions in different countries offer distance learning because this type of education saves effort, time and money. As a result, a greater effort should be made to monitor and follow up such changes in the higher education system.

In Oman, the Ministry of Higher Education has required the registration of all Omanis holding postgraduate degrees as well as the verification of the degree certificates. As a result, some certificates have been found to be faked. At the other extreme, SQU has begun offering a few distance learning courses; though this project is still on trial.

Although globalization plays an integral role in achieving faster communication and interaction among nations, this should not result in the domination of one culture over another. For the benefit of all, each nation should enhance and maintain its own culture in a way that serves and enriches the international community. Henceforth, it is suggested that the authorities in charge of higher education in Oman bear in mind the national culture of Omani society and its Islamic and Arab identity when drafting plans for higher education.

In fact, higher education in Oman still maintains a balance between tradition and modernity. Sultan Qaboos has emphasized the importance of maintaining this principle, which is the distinguishing feature of the current Omani policy, and it is essential to sustain and enhance this trend by every possible means.

5.6.5 Information Economics

One of the main characteristics of the present age is the rapid flow of information owing to advances in the communication media. This is apparent from the almost daily expansion of an existing idea or the discovery of a new piece of information.

Estimates show that the quantity of information is doubled every five years, which means that the whole education system will be influenced. It is expected that lifelong learning will spread everywhere and the intensive information economy will replace the intensive work economy and intensive capital economy (Ginkel, 2001: 246–247). Therefore, it will be rather difficult to distinguish between useful and useless information. Here enter the institutions of higher education, whose role will be to promote critical thinking among the students and secure academic freedom for the staff. In so doing, they share the responsibility for selecting constructive information and processing it in a way that serves humanity in general and the Omani nation in particular. Institutions of higher education should also provide all types of communication media, including audio-visual equipment, to enable the acquisition of information as quickly, easily and cheaply as possible.

5.6.6 Finance

One of the main problems of higher education in the developing countries, according to the UNESCO and the World Bank report *Higher Education and Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* (2000), is that most of these institutions depend on direct financing by the state. Universities do not impose tuition fees, but only a nominal registration fee, which often goes to the Ministry of Finance or the Treasury. Furthermore, higher education budgets have to be authorized by government officials, who sometimes lack an understanding of higher education issues, especially its aims, content, needs and context. Sometimes, budgets are not well structured and are not allocated fairly. For example, a maintenance budget is not clearly detailed and does not cover new buildings or equipment. Other items that are not covered in the budget include the maintenance of existing buildings, inappropriately equipped

libraries, computing laboratories, new unused equipment, or equipment that lacks spare parts or even staff to operate it. The worst aspect is that budgets cannot be carried forward to the following year, which has sometimes caused institutions to spend money at random so as not to lose the rest of the budget, which would otherwise be returned to the Ministry of Finance at the end of the financial year.

It could be said that the procedures followed in the institutions of higher education in the developing countries could be at least partly true of those in Oman. This situation requires decision-makers to review the financial policies and recommend procedures to organize and administer budgets with the aim of achieving the planned objectives of the institutions of higher education and investing their resources in the most efficient way.

5.6.7 Academic Freedom

This issue is more important than financial and administrative decentralization, especially where the institutions of higher education are financed totally by the government. Academic freedom means less interference in an institution's affairs with regard to the appointment of academic staff, research and publication. It also means freely allowing education, research and decision-making to be based on academic standards, without being affected by politics or any other factor. Unfortunately, the governments of many countries have imposed, and some are still imposing, restrictions on academic institutions concerning education, research and public opinion. One example is that some governments have dismissed academic staff or even imprisoned them simply because they have expressed their own views on a variety of issues affecting their societies. Such practices have influenced staff even in the classroom or during their research work (Altbach, 2000: 261–277).

It should be emphasized that unless institutions of higher education are allowed academic freedom, they cannot be expected to function positively and efficiently in education and research, nor can they contribute to the construction of a civilized society, the main feature of the twenty-first century. Therefore, institutions of higher education should be given a suitable measure of freedom that allows them to perform their role in an objective and less restricted manner. This applies to all Arab countries which have a problem in this area.

5.6.8 Quality

The quality of education is considered to be one of the main challenges facing institutions of higher education, especially with their increasing capacity, the shortage of finance, the inclusion of the private sector, and the expansion of distance learning and other types of extra-mural education. This new situation requires governments to establish national agencies whose mission should be the quality control of education. These agencies should survey the needs of the learners, as well as those of the employers, who need to know the level of performance of the students and type of qualifications awarded by the institutions of higher education (Randall, 2001: 116). To meet these requirements, the Accreditation Board was established in Oman in 2001, and the Gulf Common Agency for Accreditation was formed in the hope that quality control would be applied to the institutions of higher education throughout the Gulf States. Royal Decree no. 74/2001 to establish the Accreditation Board in Oman listed its responsibilities as follows:

- Prepare the necessary studies of and research into the requirements and standards of accreditation of higher education institutions and the programmes

taught at them and review the basis for their accreditation in the light of the policies made by the Council of Higher Education.

- Accredit higher education institutions.
- Accredit programmes of study offered by higher education institutions.
- Evaluate competency requirements for the practice of various professions and ensure that the academic programmes of higher education institutions meet these requirements.
- Gather information and data on programmes offered by higher education institutions and report on their standards to the Council of Higher Education.
- Lay down the procedures for the performance appraisal and improvement of the standards of higher education institutions.
- Review amendments to the national framework of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions.

(Ministry of Higher Education, 2001e:30)

5.7 Proposals for Development

Although education has been improved to a reasonable standard during the last three decades of Oman's renaissance in the twentieth century, it still requires more attention owing to the successive global developments and the lack of a national objective vision. The researcher makes the following recommendations, which seem to be important for the development of higher education in Oman and its role in serving society and meeting individual and national needs:

1. Creating a systematic administrative structure for state institutions of higher education, for this aspect was subject to numerous changes and unplanned modifications during the last three decades of the twentieth century. It is

recommended to allocate responsibility according to a rota, where each period could be assessed, and accordingly it would be decided whether or not to replace those in charge of managing an institution in the light of their performance and progress.

2. Providing additional financial support to the public institutions of higher education to absorb the annual increase in secondary school leavers. It is also important to manage and control the institutions' budget. On the other hand, policies should be drawn up to monitor the private institutions of higher education and ensure the quality of their courses. The government should continue to support these institutions by not imposing taxes or duty on them and by offering fellowships to students from low-income families.
3. Securing other financial resources in addition to those of the public to support institutions of higher education. Such resources may include renting out the commercial infrastructure of these institutions, trading products and technologies, charging fees for services offered by information technology centres, and for research and study consultations, as well as publishing and advertising.
4. Reviewing the current admissions policy with regard to meeting the students' ambitions and society's needs.
5. Activating the role of the Council for Higher Education in drawing up general policies of higher education in Oman and establishing solid links among all institutions to achieve maximum interaction and collaboration so as to realize the objectives of the national education policy.

6. Activating the role of the Accreditation Board, using expertise to ensure its smooth and unbiased operation and to establish links with similar regional and international boards.
7. Promoting cultural and scientific relationships with famous and high-quality academic and research institutions world-wide to exchange experience and enhance the national, scientific and cultural trends.
8. Supporting and financing research programmes at institutions of higher education, and establishing a research foundation that conducts applied research in all aspects of development in Oman. This could include research into the performance of the institutions of higher education, their courses and members of staff. The research foundation could contribute to the training of academic staff by organizing workshops and seminars to discuss current issues in education.
9. Establishing a statistics department under the supervision of the Council for Higher Education. Its function should be the collection of quantitative and qualitative data on higher education in Oman. It should also prepare and submit the relevant statistics to researchers and decision-makers. In fact, the diversity of institutions and the monitoring by many government departments necessitate the establishment of a statistics department.
10. Enhancing the government's role in monitoring higher education by increasing its budget, inviting all sectors of society to contribute to its financing and creating a suitable mechanism to supervise expenditure. However, these institutions should be given a certain degree of financial and administrative independence and enjoy internal academic freedom.

11. Providing education for all sectors and levels of students who meet the minimum conditions of admission, with the aim of educating as many people as possible, whether the government finances them totally or partly, or they finance themselves.
12. Allocating more fellowships to students from low-income families, and encouraging the private sector and charitable organizations to support this policy.
13. Providing equal opportunities for study, such as admitting physically handicapped students to institutions of higher education, and providing all possible means of support and suitable premises such as escalators, specially adapted corridors, parking spaces and toilets.
14. Training students in how to process the information that they acquire and how to improve and update it. This means that education objectives should introduce current approaches to education, its means and contexts.
15. Familiarizing students with social and economic globalization and training them for their future role by means of education both inside and outside the classroom.
16. Securing practical training for students in both state and private institutions, as already exists in the colleges of education and medicine. To encourage collaboration between all those concerned with the development of human resources, an annual prize could be awarded to the most co-operative institutions in training students. It is recommended that professional members of staff are employed as part-time teachers at institutions of higher education.

17. Offering mandatory courses in information technology for all higher education students and equipping all institutions with suitable computing laboratories.
18. Focusing on scientific and technical subjects, for the labour market still suffers from a shortage of these specialists. Nevertheless, the humanities should not be forgotten, for they play a vital role in forming the culture of the individual and society, and maintaining their identity.
19. Offering continuing education courses at institutions of higher education and allowing those in employment to take these courses, which will bear fruit for both the learners and the institutions.
20. Offering part-time study courses to enable those in employment, housewives and people with special needs to pursue their studies and broaden their knowledge and experience.
21. Giving more attention to students' academic and professional counselling by creating effective counselling channels within the institutions of higher education. This will assist students in selecting subjects and courses of study according to their abilities, ambitions and future careers. Counselling will also help students to progress without being subject to academic probation.
22. Improving the working conditions of the academic staff and giving them enough freedom to express themselves and discuss all issues of concern to society.
23. Designing an effective mechanism for recruiting lecturers for postgraduate qualification abroad instead of the current procedure which is based mainly on the academic grade achieved by the student.

24. Linking all the institutions of higher education in Oman into a national network and with other similar institutions abroad, using communication and information technology systems.
25. Reviewing the regulations that allow weak students to continue their studies without any restrictions, which results in free study places being occupied for a long time. It is proposed that such students should be asked to pay all or part of the tuition fees.
26. Giving more attention to the technical institutions of higher education and linking them with the Ministry of Higher Education, whose members of staff are concerned with education. The government has frequently replaced those responsible for technical education.
27. Training the administrative and technical staff at the institutions of higher education, and keeping them up to date with the latest information in their fields. This could be realized by organizing training courses, seminars and workshops both at home and abroad.
28. Designing educational courses based on information technology and providing all institutions with up-to-date technologies in this field.
29. Promoting a relationship between school and higher education by finding the best methods of teaching school pupils and preparing them for the smooth transition to study at the institutions of higher education.
30. Reviewing the expenditure on higher education students, for statistics have shown that it is very much higher than the world average.
31. Examining the recent problem of unemployment among graduates from institutions of higher education to find the reasons for it and propose the best

solutions. All parties should co-operate in solving this problem, including students, parents and public and private institutions.

32. Conducting a comprehensive survey of higher education in Oman to address questions such as: What are the objectives of higher education? What is the role of higher education in political, social and economic development? What are the future challenges? What are the best methods of facing such challenges?

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Appendices

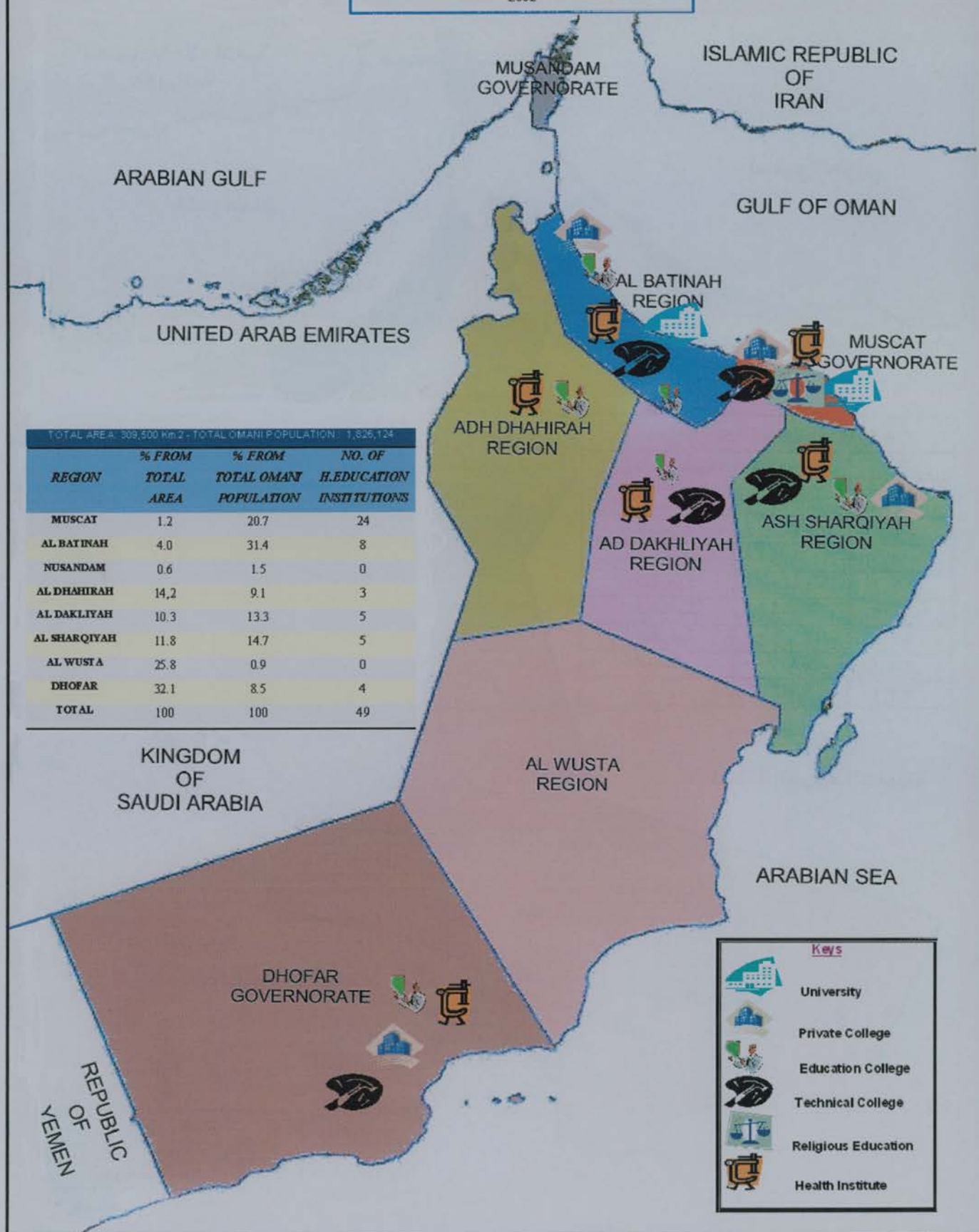
Estimates and projections of adult illiteracy for population aged 15 years and above in Oman by gender 1970-2015

YEAR	ILLITERACY RATE (%)			ILLITERACY POPULATION (000)			TOTAL ADULT POPULATION (000)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1970	81.5	68.3	94.7	329	139	190	404	204	200
1975	72.4	57.4	90.7	355	155	199	490	271	220
1980	63.8	48.6	83.7	399	172	227	626	355	271
1985	54.5	40.2	73.3	427	178	248	783	444	339
1990	45.3	32.7	61.7	433	177	257	956	540	416
1995	36.3	25.9	49.4	423	168	255	1,165	649	516
2000	28.3	19.9	38.4	402	155	246	1,419	778	642
2005	21.7	15.1	29.5	367	141	234	1,729	934	795
2010	16.6	11.3	22.7	342	124	217	2,055	1,096	959
2015	12.9	8.4	17.9	310	107	203	2,403	1,268	1,134

Source: UNESCO, 2002.

SULTANATE OF OMAN

MAP OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
2002



TOTAL AREA: 309,500 Km² - TOTAL OMANI POPULATION: 1,826,124

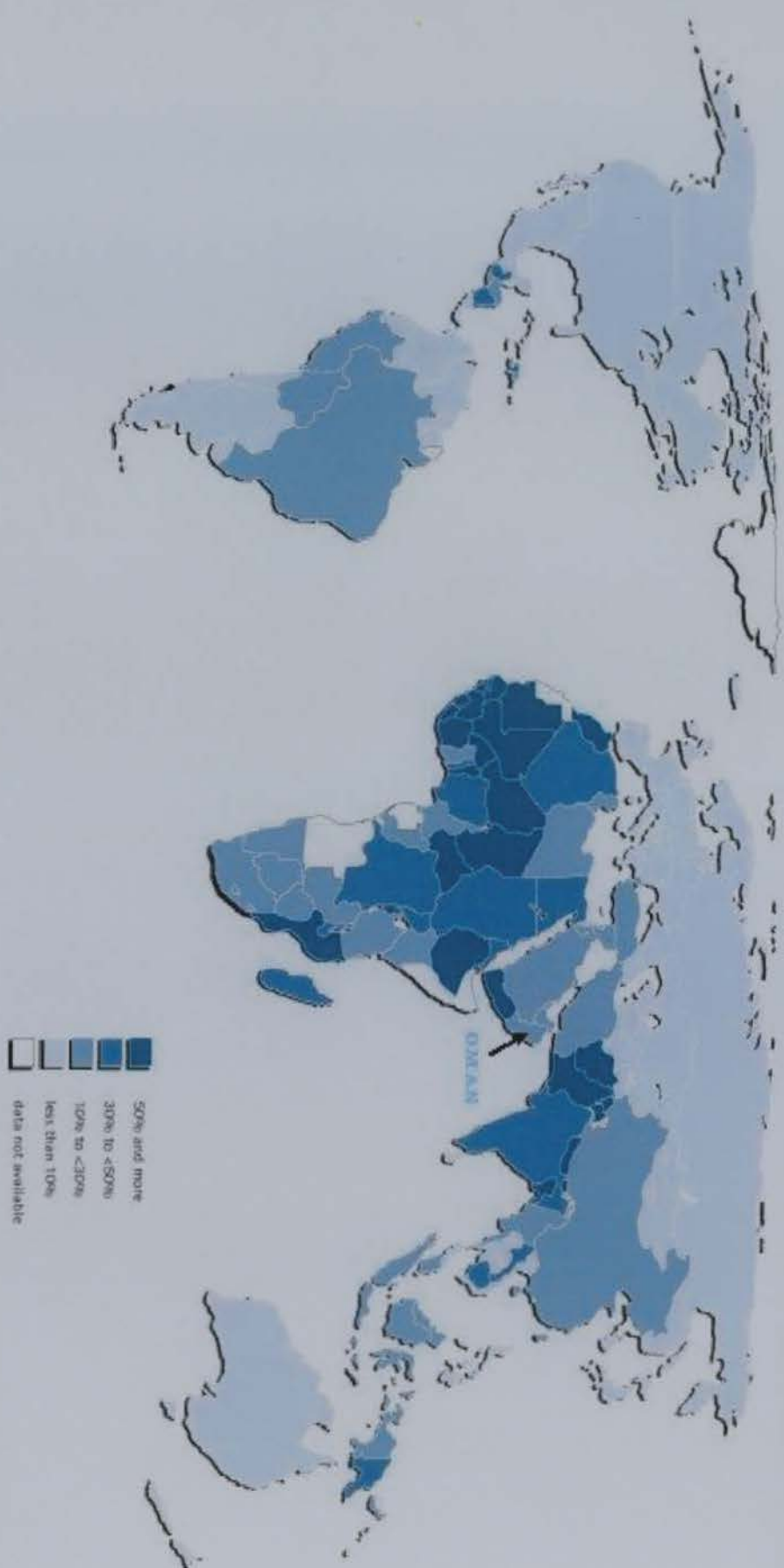
REGION	% FROM TOTAL AREA	% FROM TOTAL OMANI POPULATION	NO. OF H. EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS
MUSCAT	1.2	20.7	24
AL BATINAH	4.0	31.4	8
NUSANDAM	0.6	1.5	0
AL DHAHIRAH	14.2	9.1	3
AL DAKLIYAH	10.3	13.3	5
AL SHARQIYAH	11.8	14.7	5
AL WUSTA	25.8	0.9	0
DHOFAR	32.1	8.5	4
TOTAL	100	100	49

Keys

	University
	Private College
	Education College
	Technical College
	Religious Education
	Health Institute

Map shows the variation in tertiary enrolment ratios across the countries of the world





Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates, July 2002.

Source: UNESCO, 2002.